

THE ESSAYS OF GEORGE ORWELL
1931-1941

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Abstract

This thesis takes as its focus the essays of George Orwell published between 1931 and 1941. I locate these essays within the arena of debate afforded by the Left-leaning periodicals in which most first appeared, emphasising the crucial (though hitherto neglected) importance of the periodical medium to the development and transmission of Orwell's arguments. Many of the essays considered here are salvaged from obscure or defunct journals, and have been lost to the public gaze for more than half a century. As a result of the inclusion of this material, the thesis constitutes the most complete and sustained analysis to date of Orwell's early essays.

In Chapter One I note an inherent critical dimension in the essay form itself, one compatible with Orwell's polemical approach. An historical survey of the development of the periodical traces how the periodical essay comes to be established firmly in the field of public debate, culminating in a sketch of the periodical background in which Orwell's essays were published. In the five chapters which follow, I examine the essays under five rubrics: Imperialism; the Spanish Civil War; Totalitarianism; Socialism, and Literature. Each chapter charts the visions and revisions which characterise Orwell's thought in a turbulent decade, with particular reference to the periodicals in which he and others set out their views. Such contextualisation registers Orwell's conscious use of the periodical medium, both to promote his often controversial opinions, and to assail the arguments of his opponents. The approach of the thesis necessarily facilitates a wider perspective than that of Orwell's essays, and I argue for the significance of the periodical as a means of debate in the literate and volatile section of the Left in which Orwell chose to operate.

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This thesis is dedicated to Robert Marks and Sharon Marks, for gifts I can only begin to repay.

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me, and is my own work.

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Notes on the Text

As is standard practice, where the Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus edited, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, is referred to, the abbreviation *CEJL* is used; individual volumes are designated by Roman numerals. The title of the Peter Davison edited, *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, is shortened to *The Complete Orwell*. Individual volume numbers are given.

Where an essay by Orwell cited in the text does not appear in *CEJL*, the page numbers given are those of the periodical in which the essay was published originally. Where the essay does appear in *CEJL*, those page numbers are given as well. For example:

George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', *New Writing* (Autumn 1936), pp. 1-7. *CEJL I*, pp. 235-42.

Introduction

He was neither a first-rank literary critic nor a major novelist, and certainly not an original thinker; but he was, I now believe, the greatest English essayist since Hazlitt, maybe since Dr. Johnson. He was the greatest moral force in English letters during the last several decades.

Irving Howe, *Harper's Magazine*, January 1967.¹

In the essays [Orwell] wrote in his lifetime [sic], he addressed the small groups of intellectual readers of small-scale magazines like *Horizon* and *Polemic*. Since his death, he has become a writer with an impact upon the imagination of the mass reader.

T.R.Fyvel, *George Orwell: A Personal Memoir*, 1982.²

Perhaps too much has already been written about George Orwell; the 'Orwell industry', now a flourishing multi-national, risks saturating the public and academic markets with produce. There can be few people still drawing breath who, having known Orwell at some point, have not committed their ageing memories to paper.³ Interpretations of the writer himself by those who did not know Orwell but wish they had (if only to set him right on one or two things) continue unabated; the queues for the best viewpoints, however, are getting ever longer.⁴ The 'Authorised Biography' (the second to defy Orwell's explicit request that none should be written) is still cooling down from the presses.⁵ Less than seven years after the end of what some commentators christened 'Orwell's Year', the world can certainly wait for further exegeses of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, even if some critics still get the book's title wrong.⁶ Yet, while certain areas of research seem to attract fierce (if not always productive) interpretive competition, others lie strangely underexploited. One such area in Orwell studies concerns his essays.

Jeffrey and Valerie Meyers' *George Orwell: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* provides a ready index for the lack of critical attention accorded the essays.⁷ The bibliography surveys five hundred 'books, articles and important reviews in English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Norwegian and Japanese'.⁸ Naturally, many of the studies included contain interpretations of some of the essays, but the Meyers

list only one book devoted solely to the essays. Sadly, as the title of Hakan Ringbom's *George Orwell as Essayist: A Stylistic Analysis* suggests (or warns), Ringbom employs a computational model in his analysis.⁹ This model generates the illuminating insights that Orwell uses 'more than three analogous syntactic units in the same sentence'¹⁰ more often than do other writers, and that a 'typographical device he uses to add emphasis to his arguments is italics'.¹¹ The prospect that these statements may be true does not make them interesting.

The relative neglect of Orwell's essays as a body of work seems puzzling, and its redressing the more necessary, given his growing status as an essayist. While Irving Howe's assessment at the head of the chapter suffers more than a little from hyperbole, other critics also rate Orwell highly. Patrick Reilly, in a recent study, glorifies Orwell as 'a great essayist'; David Wykes describes him as 'one of the greatest of English essayists'.¹² John Hammond places Orwell only slightly lower on the essayists' ranking than does Howe. Hammond sets up more restrictive (if still generous) temporal boundaries for his assessment, arguing that in terms of 'volume, range and intellectual depth [Orwell's] essays are unrivalled this century'.¹³

Even those critics less willing to place Orwell at the top of the league table of this century's essayists recognise the importance of the essays to his output. Orwell's first major biographer, Bernard Crick, while stating cautiously that Orwell 'developed as an essayist', admits that '[m]uch critical opinion now locates his genius in his essays. There is much to be said for this view'.¹⁴ The American critical titan Harold Bloom, introducing essays on *1984* [sic], opines that 'Orwell, aesthetically considered, is a far better essayist than a novelist'.¹⁵ Unless Bloom is damning with faint praise, this is a considerable claim.

From a different perspective, John Rodden, in his 1989 study of the development of Orwell's reputation, argues that only

perhaps in the essay form, where his compelling ethos so strongly appeals – can [Orwell's literary achievement] bear the weight of esteem and significance which successive generations have bestowed upon him.¹⁶

Rodden's particular insight here, as well as his general thesis, illuminate the degree to which Orwell's reputation as an iconoclast and (paradoxically) his position as an icon, are posthumous constructions.

Orwell's essays provide a ready means by which to gauge the gulf

between the Orwell of the thirties and forties, and that of the nineties. John Hammond estimates that Orwell had more than one hundred essays published.¹⁷ Hammond neglects to note, however, that at the time of Orwell's death only eleven of this hundred were available in collected form. Orwell's premature death activated a number of salvage teams who set out to recover the remaining essays of a writer belatedly attaining the status of cultural cult hero.

The publication in 1968 of the four volume set, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (hereafter *CEJL*) marked a milestone in that salvaging process.¹⁸ Even so, the publication of Orwell's entire essay output must await the remaining volumes of *The Complete Works of George Orwell* (hereafter *Complete Orwell*) due out in 1993.¹⁹ While unconnected with that project, this thesis draws water from the same well, the Orwell Archive at the University of London. As a result, roughly a quarter of the essays considered in these pages are interpreted at length for the first time.

Given the dictates set for the Ph.D. thesis, any study examining over one hundred essays must deteriorate quickly into superficiality. Consequently, only essays published between 1931 and 1941 will be considered in detail. The earlier date can be justified by the fact that it marks the year in which Orwell's career as a writer began to take definite shape. In that year, 'A Hanging', the first of his now-famous essays, appeared. Nothing so obviously momentous happened for Orwell in 1941, though he did publish 'The Lion and The Unicorn', his idiosyncratic call for patriotic revolutionary Socialism.²⁰ By August of that year, however, Orwell writes in his wartime diary of a 'new phase' in the war. He adds gloomily that, as 'the quasi-revolutionary period which began with Dunkirk is finished I therefore bring this diary to an end, as I intended to when the new phase started'.²¹ This marks a delineating moment in Orwell's perception of the war itself and the potential for the revolution he supported. As such, it provides a useful boundary for the analysis in this thesis.

The uncollected essays lay scattered and buried in a wide variety of periodicals: some, such as Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*, well-known; others, amongst them *Controversy*, *The Highway*, and *New Leader*, all but forgotten, except by readers and contributors. Despite the critical black hole into which some of these periodicals have fallen, however, they represent an important key to an understanding of Orwell as writer, activist, and thinker. The crucial, though neglected link between Orwell and the periodical medium provides the focal point of this thesis.

A preliminary indicator of the importance of the periodical for Orwell comes from a review by Robert Waller of the second number of the literary periodical, *New Writing*. Waller's review appeared in the rival journal, *The Adelphi*, and, perhaps wishing to stake an early claim to a promising young writer, Waller asserts that 'Orwell is an *Adelphi* discovery'.²² Waller's boast is well-founded: Eric Blair's sketch, 'The Spike', had appeared in the pages of *The Adelphi* in April 1931.²³ Months later, *The Adelphi* printed a more enduring piece, the essay 'A Hanging'.²⁴ Nearly two years before the release of his first book, then, Orwell was a published essayist. Perhaps even more importantly for the struggling writer, the review work he undertook for such periodicals as *The Adelphi* provided both a small revenue and contact with the literary world to which he aspired.²⁵

Tosco Fyvel's comment at the head of this chapter, that the audience for Orwell's essays consisted of 'the small groups of intellectual readers of small-scale magazines like *Horizon* and *Polemic*', contains enough truth to mislead. Clearly, Fyvel recognises the importance of the various periodicals to the publication of Orwell's essays. He also concocts a reasonable generalisation of the audiences for both *Horizon* and *Polemic*. Fyvel errs, however, in limiting the readership of Orwell's essays to such periodicals. He did not meet Orwell until 1940, but makes an error common to friends of the famous, assuming that what he observed was indicative of Orwell's life as a whole.

The three periodicals listed above in which Orwell had essays published indicate an audience far more diverse than the small groups of intellectuals cited by Fyvel. *Controversy*, for example, advertised itself as a forum for views across the political spectrum of the Left in Britain. Remarkably, given the virulent political antagonisms current in the 1930s, *Controversy* held true to its brief, publishing a crush of conflicting views. *The Highway*, by contrast, was a workers' periodical published by the 'Workers' Educational Association'. On the other hand, *New Leader*, the weekly publication of the Independent Labour Party (hereafter I.L.P.) broadcast an impassioned and incessant plea for political radicalism.

A roll call of the periodicals in which Orwell had essays published reveals an impressive array: *New Writing*; *New Road*; *Gangrel*; *Partisan Review*; *Politics and Letters*; *Left News*; *Contemporary Jewish Record*; *The Tribune*; *The Listener*; *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*; *The New English Weekly*, as well as those already mentioned and others to be discussed during the course of this thesis. The circulation of many of these was relatively small, and in some cases readerships overlapped

slightly, but the variety of periodicals argues against Fyvel's facile circumscription of the audience for Orwell's essays.²⁶

What Fyvel does get right, and what must be borne clearly in mind, is that the readership for Orwell's essays since his death has expanded almost exponentially. In this thesis, however, attention is limited to the rationale behind – and the response to – the essays in their own time. To give an instructive example: the readers of *The Adelphi* who read Eric Blair's 'A Hanging' in 1931 had no way of knowing that that essay eventually would be employed by David Lodge to answer the momentous question, 'What is Literature?'.²⁷

The realisation of the gap that separates Orwell's posthumous reputation from that in the years up to 1941 tempers an overestimation of the initial impact of Orwell's essays. For example, Bernard Crick, in writing on 'Such, Such Were The Joys', notes that it 'is a polemical essay intended, like "A Hanging" . . . to have a direct effect on the reader'.²⁸ If 'A Hanging' did directly affect *Adelphi* readers, no trace of the impact is to be found in subsequent editions of the periodical. 'A Hanging' beautifully illustrates a crucial point, that many of Orwell's essays, intentionally polemical or not, sank without trace soon after their initial publication. Nearly twenty years were to pass before 'A Hanging', published in the collection of Orwell's essays, *Shooting an Elephant*, was accessible to the general public.²⁹ In the interval, the essay only existed in rapidly ageing copies of *The Adelphi*.

The initial readers of 'A Hanging' would not have been the only ones surprised by the eventual fame of both the essay and its author; Eric Blair himself could not have guessed at, or hoped for, the status he would later be accorded. Importantly, in the period examined in this thesis, Orwell wrote not from olympian heights, as a lauded literary, political and cultural commentator, but from the position of a struggling and relatively unimportant writer. Rather than the star, Orwell was merely a spear carrier on a crowded and noisy stage.

Posthumous Essay Collections

An obvious difficulty in accepting Orwell's essays as minor elements in the debates at the time in which they first were published comes from the shadow cast by *CEJL*. The fact that the essays contained in those four volumes will be supplemented by those to be included in the *Complete Orwell* does little to deter a feeling that the importance

bestowed on Orwell and his essays has remained constant. One antidote to this feeling comes from reviewing the long and fragmented process by which Orwell's essays were recovered for his posthumous audience.

As has already been noted, at the time of his death in 1950 only a tiny proportion of Orwell's essays were available to the public. Neither of his essay collections were in print. The type for *Inside the Whale*, first published in 1940, had been distributed after an initial run of 1,000 copies.³⁰ *Critical Essays* sold better (over 8,000 copies had been printed), but it had been published back in 1946.³¹ These two collections, remember, contained only 11 essays between them. Two long essays had appeared in book form: 'The Lion and The Unicorn' and 'The English People'. The former had been something of a success, selling over 10,000 copies, but that had been almost nine years before Orwell's death.³² 'The English People', was more recent, having been published in 1947, but less successful.³³ This, then, was the sum total of Orwell's essays not languishing in periodicals in 1950.

The dearth of Orwell's essays collected in book form did not long outlast his death. While it might appear overly cynical to link the two, the fact remains that, with the sales of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* skyrocketing, the essays provided a largely untapped seam of 'new' material. This was especially so in the United States, where the personality cult developing around the writer benefitted from the publication of essays by Orwell that had previously appeared only in British periodicals. Given the relatively small circulations of those periodicals, however, many of the essays contained in the posthumous collections were new to British readers as well.

These collections drew upon a wide variety of periodical sources. The first, *Shooting an Elephant*, published in 1950, contained essays from *Now*, *Polemic*, *Partisan Review* and *Horizon*, as well as several of Orwell's 'As I Please' columns from *Tribune*. Apart from the *Tribune* pieces, all these had been written after 1946.³⁴ Yet, whereas none of essays in either *Inside the Whale* or *Critical Essays* had been published before 1940, *Shooting an Elephant* broke new ground, with the inclusion of two essays from a more distant past. The title essay had appeared originally in John Lehmann's *New Writing* in 1936. The other retrieved essay, 'A Hanging', had been published initially in 1931. In the intervening nineteen years it had lain unconsidered in *The Adelphi*.

A prefatory note to *Shooting an Elephant* went a short way towards contextualising the included essays. In this note it was stated that the essays had been drawn from the periodicals listed above. Why particular

essays had been selected (apart from the fact that they had not been published in book form before) was not made clear; perhaps it was felt that the essays spoke for themselves. Whatever the selection criteria, *Shooting an Elephant* almost doubled the number of easily accessible essays.

The body of essays grew larger still in 1953 with the publication of the second posthumous essay collection, *England Your England*.³⁵ This volume added ten more essays to the corpus, in the British edition, at least. An American edition, *Such, Such Were the Joys*, was published at the same time, though the title must have baffled British readers; for legal reasons, the title essay does not appear in the English edition.³⁶ Indeed, the potential threat of legal action had meant that 'Such, Such Were The Joys', written by 1947, was not published in Orwell's lifetime. It first appeared in the American periodical, *Partisan Review* late in 1952.³⁷

As with *Shooting an Elephant*, *England Your England* plundered its essays from periodicals, extending what was already an impressive list: *Gangrel*; *Politics and Letters*; *Contemporary Jewish Record*; *New Saxon Pamphlets* and *New Road* provided new sources.³⁸ Again, as in *Shooting an Elephant*, no rationale is given for the selection of the included essays. A crucial difference between the two collections, however, concerned the provenance of the essays. While in *Shooting an Elephant* a note indicated in general terms that the essays had been drawn from periodicals, in *England Your England* no such details were given.

The omission of information on the source of the essays obscures the fact that the contents of *England Your England* had been written originally for periodicals as different as *New Writing* and *Contemporary Jewish Record*. This lack of contextualisation necessarily creates a sense of cohesiveness at odds with subject matter which ranges across mining conditions in Northern England, the Spanish Civil War, and anti-Semitism. The failure to locate the essays in a particular period also conceals the reality that they had been published over a period of eleven turbulent years. It would be surprising indeed if Orwell's views had not changed in some form between the mid-1930s and the mid-1940s. Unfortunately, the format of *England Your England* did nothing to provide such a perspective.

With the publication of *England Your England* and its American variant, all the essays which made up the Orwell *oeuvre* until 1968 had been collected. The years between 1953 and 1968 saw six further collections appear, though none added any new essays.³⁹ Certain pieces came to be the favourites of compilers of these anthologies: 'Inside the Whale', 'Boys'

Weeklies', 'The Art of Donald McGill' and 'Raffles and Miss Blandish' reappear in several collections.⁴⁰ Each had been published in collections during Orwell's lifetime. Other essays, which had survived only in periodicals, were given new life and celebrity in posthumous anthologies. Some, such as 'Why I Write' and 'Shooting an Elephant', came to be seen as touchstones either for Orwell's thinking or his life.⁴¹

Why certain essays should find favour was never explained by the respective editors of the posthumous collections. No collections carried introductions justifying the essays contained within them. More importantly, given the thrust of this thesis, the fact that the essays had been published originally in periodicals (let alone the year in which they first appeared) was ignored. The chosen essays became building blocks in the monument erected to Orwell in the years after his death.

One bizarre result of the posthumous collections was that, as early as the publication of *Shooting an Elephant* only months after Orwell's death, readers had greater access to his essays than when he was alive. By 1953, with *England Your England*, the number and availability of essays were only improved; the Orwell fan of 1954 did not have to find an August 1931 number of *The Adelphi* in order to savour 'A Hanging'. In the years that followed, in between occasional reprints of the early collections, fresh collections no doubt attracted new readers, even if they added no new material. The essays became somewhat scattered in a variety of volumes, but, with a little searching, they could be found.

Even that minor inconvenience was overcome with the publication in 1968 of the four volume *CEJL*. Edited by Orwell's widow, Sonia, and Ian Angus, the librarian at the Orwell Archive, *CEJL* contained all the essays collected to that point. Many additional essays were included: 'Bookshop Memories', 'In Defence of the Novel', 'Why I Join the ILP' and 'My Country Right or Left' in the first volume alone. *CEJL* also contained more selections from Orwell's prickly *Tribune* column, 'As I Please', his war time letters to *Partisan Review*, various diaries and letters, as well as miscellaneous pieces from Orwell's days at the B.B.C.

In a break with tradition, an introduction by Sonia Orwell justified the chronological ordering of material and explained the exclusion of certain letters and pieces of journalism. On the question of order, Sonia Orwell argued that division by such broad categories as 'political' and 'literary' was unfeasible.⁴² In addition, she considered that the chronological order allowed the painting of a 'continuous picture of [George] Orwell's life' without disobeying his request that no biography be written.⁴³ 'A Note on Editing' explained the 'rare' tampering with chronology

as being carried out for the 'sake of illustrating the development of Orwell's thought'.⁴⁴ She seemed not to realise that this argument was self-contradictory.

The problems created by the chronological anomalies in *CEJL* will be dealt with in the relevant chapters. A foretaste can be gained, nevertheless, by noting that the first volume, the title of which includes the parameters '1920–1940', begins with 'Why I Write', an essay not written until 1947. Placed at the front of *CEJL*, 'Why I Write' functions as a statement of intent, a manifesto to which Orwell adheres (supposedly) in the writing which follows. In actuality, the essay faces backwards as much as forwards; Orwell reviews his career and motives in the light of experience. His analysis of the reasons writers write is meant to be generally applicable.

The attempt signals a fact all too easily ignored in the consideration of 'Why I Write': the essay was not something that Orwell felt compelled to write of his own volition, but was commissioned by John Pick, the editor of the obscure and short-lived periodical, *Gangrel*. Orwell was only one of several writers approached by Pick to contribute their thoughts on a topic at the heart of *Gangrel's* concerns – that writing was a vocation.⁴⁵ Orwell's essay confirms that thesis; yet, without Pick's prompt, 'Why I Write' would not have been written.

Sonia Orwell justified the exclusion from *CEJL* of certain material on the grounds that some work was mundane, of inferior quality, or ephemeral.⁴⁶ She further claimed that '[a]nything [Orwell] would have considered an essay is certainly included'.⁴⁷ Yet, unless George Orwell entertained a peculiar definition of the essay, this last statement was misleading, if not simply untrue. Though this thesis confines itself to the years 1931–1941, more than five essays not included in *CEJL* are considered. Among these excluded essays are two dealing with the Spanish Civil War ('Eye-Witness in Barcelona' and 'Caesarean Section in Spain') as well as three wartime essays in which Socialism, Democracy and Fascism are compared ('Democracy and Fascism', 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' and 'Our Opportunity').⁴⁸ Neglect might have relegated these essays to the position of ephemera; their respective quality is something for contention; but none are mundane.

Despite its shortcomings, *CEJL* performs several valuable functions. Not only do the volumes contain previously uncollected material, but they also make an effort towards contextualising the essays: publication dates are given, as well as the specific periodical in which essays first appeared. The editors also included footnotes giving short histories of the

relevant periodicals, many of which had sunk, almost without trace. The resurrected essays thus added to the catalogue of periodicals for which Orwell wrote, the first volume of *CEJL* alone containing essays from *New Leader*, *The New English Weekly*, *Left Forum* and *Folios of New Writing*.

Paradoxically, while *CEJL* indicated the respective journals, the fact that these essays were collected in four volumes undercut the recognition of their disparate sources. While the importance of the periodical medium is signalled in *CEJL*, by their very nature the volumes suggest that the essays have some inherent unity beyond the fact that they were all written by Orwell. As a consequence, the revisions and contradictions which pepper Orwell's thought and writing (and make it naggingly compulsive) can be overlooked. Just as importantly, and again as a result of its format, *CEJL* creates a sense that Orwell's essays sprang fully formed from his forehead, the work of an original mind.

As this thesis sets out to show, however, the arguments and analyses of other periodical essay writers often provoked, and sometimes persuaded, Orwell. Periodicals provided him with platforms from which to broadcast his views and criticise those of others; they in turn were free to counterpunch. The periodical essay provided Orwell with a keen debating weapon, allowing him rapid access to the arena of public debate. An important caveat needs to be set down at this early stage, however; for the most part, the 'public' that Orwell addressed in his essays until 1941 remained a loosely affiliated collection of small groups, politically to the left of centre.⁴⁹ Despite their lack of size, the various literary and political factions which existed, and which coalesced around a variety of periodicals, generated vigorous argument and criticism: against their obvious enemies, supposed colleagues, and within themselves. The importance of the periodical medium for Orwell's thinking and writing has largely been neglected in analyses of the writer. This thesis aims to redress that neglect.

Into the Memory Hole? The Critical Neglect of Orwell's Essays

As evidenced by the Meyers' bibliography, Orwell's essays have escaped extended critical assessment; this, despite Orwell's qualities as an essayist being recognised during his lifetime, by critics as discerning as Q.D. Leavis and Edmund Wilson.⁵⁰ As the preceding publication history showed, however, critics at the time of Orwell's death were hampered by the difficulties in locating all but a small percentage of the total output.

Despite the good notices of the Leavises and Wilsons, even after his death the relative lack of material played havoc with detailed critical analysis of Orwell's essays.

An indication of the problem comes from an unlikely source: Wyndham Lewis. In *The Writer and The Absolute*, Lewis laments that

At the time of writing [1952] . . . *Critical Essays* and *Shooting an Elephant* [are] all that is available in book form. [Orwell's] essays will ultimately take their place besides his last two novels, and with them make a slender but valuable body of work.⁵¹

Lewis deserves praise for his perspicacity, even if he does get the facts wrong; he forgets *Inside the Whale*, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' and 'The English People'. Even so, he signals the problems faced by early Orwell critics.

Had Lewis waited another year, his study would have benefitted from the publication of *England Your England*. Despite the new material, however, the studies of Orwell in the mid-1950s tended to use the essays as mortar to bind larger political, literary or biographical blocks. Laurence Brander, for example, skims over several political essays in *George Orwell*, published in 1954.⁵² While he devotes a chapter to 'Literary Essays', he concentrates on only four; the three from the 1940 *Inside the Whale* collection, as well as 'Lear, Tolstoy, and The Fool'.⁵³ The other literary essays receive only passing mention.

Brander does at least give separate attention to some of Orwell's essays; the same cannot be said for either John Atkins or Christopher Hollis. In *George Orwell: A Literary Study*, published in the same year as Brander's work, Atkins uses the essays as steppingstones to larger arguments on Orwell's character.⁵⁴ The title of the first chapter, 'Decency the Foundation', gives some idea of Atkins's reverential approach. Hollis's *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and his Works*, published in 1956, glances at over 30 essays in the course of its portrait of the writer. Yet, apart from a chapter dealing with Orwell's essays on Kipling, Wells, Yeats and Koestler, no essays get much more than a couple of references. As if to emphasise Hollis's sense of the importance of the essays, the chapter on Kipling and the rest runs to all of five pages.⁵⁵

Richard Rees's 1961 study, *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* continues the trend in early Orwell scholarship by interweaving the worth of Orwell's writing with his supposed worth as a human being.⁵⁶ As a long-time friend of Orwell's, the attitude is not surprising,

though Rees acknowledges that Orwell is 'famous mainly on account of two books – *Animal Farm* and *1984* [sic] – while the rest of his work is comparatively less well known'.⁵⁷ If nothing else, Rees suggests the extent to which comparisons with Dr. Johnson were late additions to the assessment of Orwell's worth. In doing so, Rees also provides a plausible reason for the neglect of the essays in previous studies of Orwell.

Two otherwise interesting studies from the mid-1960s, while adding to the variety of characterisations of Orwell, hardly develop an understanding of his essays. George Woodcock's *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell*, published in 1967, provides an engaging, if somewhat overly-sympathetic, portrait of Orwell.⁵⁸ Woodcock fruitfully intertwines biography and literary criticism, although, as in the case of 'A Hanging', he occasionally gets more biographical mileage out of the literature than is warranted.⁵⁹ As the title of Jenni Calder's 1968 study, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler*, makes plain, her emphasis lies in comparing and contrasting two idiosyncratic and magnetic writers.⁶⁰

1968 also marked the year in which *CEJL* appeared. John Rodden, analysing the effect of the collection on Orwell's reputation, claims that *CEJL* "revived" Orwell – who had become something of a dated figure – as a subject of ideological dispute on the Left'.⁶¹ If Orwell needed reviving, *CEJL* did so with a vengeance: Irving Howe's assessment of Orwell at the head of this chapter is a response to the publication of *CEJL*; George Steiner, in his review, metaphorically prostrates himself in considering that, to him, 'the notion of "reviewing" George Orwell is mildly impertinent'.⁶² Steiner lavishly describes the four volumes as 'a place of renewal for the moral imagination'.⁶³

Even some who might have been expected to carry an ideological ice-pick praised the Orwell displayed in *CEJL*. Peter Sedgewick of the *Socialist Worker*, while decrying Orwell's 'Cold War tendencies', acknowledges 'his honesty and courage in an age of suffocating political illusion'.⁶⁴ Yet, while Orwell himself won repeated encores for the essays and journalism (his letters not being particularly revelatory) *CEJL* did not escape criticism. Conor Cruise O'Brien described aspects of the collection as 'puzzling' and 'disturbing': 'the edition is not what it appears to be'.⁶⁵ In a lengthy review, Mary McCarthy questioned certain omissions, while undercutting Orwell's reputation as an essayist.⁶⁶ Yet despite these criticisms, John Rodden notes perceptively that

even though it was not possible to make a full assessment of Orwell's

achievement until *CEJL* appeared, the volumes did not alter most critics' opinions: by 1968 many critics had committed themselves to a certain view of Orwell and they continued to defend entrenched positions.⁶⁷

This entrenchment may account for the fact that, despite the plaudits for Orwell as an essayist, the essays themselves continued to be ignored as a topic for extended analysis by subsequent critics.

A new and cluttered gallery of Orwell portraits emerged in the 1970s. Raymond Williams's lucid and provocative sketch, *Orwell*, exposed and probed a writer Williams rightly saw as an amalgam of contradictions and candour.⁶⁸ *The World of George Orwell*, edited by Miriam Gross and also published in 1971, added little to what was known of Orwell, and nothing to an understanding of his essays.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, as one of a series of popular portraits of famous writers, it did confirm Orwell's growing status. In *Outside the Whale: George Orwell's Art and Politics*, another work from 1972, Orwell's essays ('The Lion and The Unicorn' apart) play little part in David Kubal's analysis.⁷⁰

Peter Stansky's and William Abrahams' contentious 1972 study, *The Unknown Orwell*, continued the trend of interweaving biography and writing. Given that they are biographers, not critics, Stansky and Abrahams eschew the literary examination of Orwell's early essays. At times, however, most clearly as with 'A Hanging', synthetic fibres are introduced into the biographical weave when sufficient natural materials prove unavailable.⁷¹ In Alan Sandison's engaging, idiosyncratic 1974 work, *The Last Man in Europe: An Essay on George Orwell*, Orwell is said to have the 'instinct . . . of the *homo religiosus*: his particular source of moral and spiritual energy is the Protestant dialectic'.⁷² Sadly, however, and despite the teasing title, Orwell's essays play no great part in Sandison's discussion.

The list of 1974 studies of Orwell was swelled by Alex Zwerdling's *Orwell and the Left* and *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Raymond Williams.⁷³ As with the critiques of Kubal and Sandison, Zwerdling's wide scope does not allow for any detailed assessment of Orwell's essays. In the Williams anthology, by contrast, John Wain deals (admittedly in general terms) with Orwell as a polemical essayist.⁷⁴

The twenty-fifth anniversary of Orwell's death was marked by two works emphasising both his general importance and his status as a writer worthy of serious study: *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage* (again, one of a series designed to adorn the necks of the famous), and

A Reader's Guide to George Orwell.⁷⁵ Both books were the work of Orwell aficionado Jeffrey Meyers. *The Critical Heritage* proves true to its title, giving contemporary reviews of Orwell's works, including posthumous collections of his essays. In the *Reader's Guide*, Meyers devotes a whole chapter to 'The Essays', but here the title misleads. Meyers categorises Orwell's essays into five 'major groups: autobiographical, literary, political, sociological and cultural'.⁷⁶ He then deals at length with only six essays. The relegation of the essays to a subordinate position in the Orwell corpus is emphasised further by Meyers' justification that '[a] discussion of some representative essays . . . provides a framework for the analysis of [Orwell's] major work'.⁷⁷ Ironically, Meyers detects numerous similarities between Orwell and Samuel Johnson; unlike Irving Howe, however, these similarities appear not to extend to Orwell's achievement as an essayist.⁷⁸

In 1977 Jeffrey Meyers, along with Valerie Meyers, produced the *Annotated Bibliography* (already cited) which exposed the lack of sustained critical attention given the essays. The key piece of Orwell scholarship in the year following was Bernard Crick's lauded if controversial biography, first published in 1980. Crick considers nearly forty essays over the course of the book, though his brief meant that any in-depth analysis of the essays was concerned with their status as biographical evidence.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Crick's proposal, to tell 'how [Orwell's] books and essays came to be written and how they were published', inevitably led him to delineate Orwell's relationship with certain periodicals.⁸⁰ As a result, the importance to Orwell of *The Adelphi*, *The New English Weekly*, *Tribune*, *Horizon* and (mostly in a negative sense) *The New Statesman and Nation* is made clearer for the first time. Crick's checklist of periodicals is not comprehensive, however; he therefore underestimates the extent to which Orwell's ideas were forged and tested in the periodical medium as a whole.

J.R. Hammond's 1982 *George Orwell Companion* adds nothing to the list of full-length studies of Orwell's essays set out by the Meyers five years earlier. Hammond includes a section on the essays, though in only forty pages he attempts little more than brief exposition of the (posthumously) more famous essays. This can be excused given that Hammond's book functions as a guide for new readers of Orwell, rather than a fresh analysis. Even so, Hammond's biases show: the essays in the collection, *Inside the Whale*, occupy one quarter of the allotted space, while a single essay, 'Such, Such Were The Joys', receives as much treatment as the complete *CEJL*.⁸¹ *Companions* can lead you astray.

By the time Hammond's book appeared, the tidal wave of studies, symposia and plain silliness that would sweep the planet in 1984 had begun to gain volume and momentum. The truth, falsity or applicability of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* claimed much attention, despite the fact that the title, when properly rendered, did not advertise the book as prophecy. Orwell may not be the saintly figure of popular iconography, but he was certainly no Nostradamus. Yet, though Orwell as man and writer was reassessed, dissected, reconstructed and deconstructed, his essays failed to grab extended critical attention.⁸²

This was so even in some books which strove to journey beyond the usual boundaries of Orwell scholarship. Daphne Patai only occasionally employs particular essays in her provocative study, *The Orwell Mystique*. Admittedly, Patai has an ideological barrow to push, and the novels better suit her central thesis that Orwell's writing was founded on his 'androcentrism'.⁸³ Even though the ten contributors to *George Orwell: Inside the Myth* range over wider territory, none sees fit to make more than a passing reference to particular essays.⁸⁴

One 1984 critical study, Lynette Hunter's *George Orwell: The Search For A Voice*, gives the essays shared billing in the central of its three sections: 'Essays, Letters, Broadcasts'.⁸⁵ Hunter contends that Orwell's essays up to 1939 illustrate his early idea that

expressed 'meaning' is of something quantifiable. It is related to his intellectual understanding of the concepts of language, truth and history as things exact, definable and absolute. However, he comes to recognize two complicating factors: the first is that an impression of exactitude and accuracy is a matter of a specific 'line' of interpretation being imposed on events; and the second, the corollary of such control by imposition, that it is at most arbitrary.⁸⁶

By 1940, Hunter argues, 'Orwell's fictions state and evidence an undeniable dislike of authoritarianism' and a 'knowledge of narratorial infallibility'.⁸⁷

Hunter falls into the trap of accepting such works as *Down And Out In Paris And London* and *The Road To Wigan Pier* as uncompromisingly accurate accounts; a comparison of the latter to 'The Road To Wigan Pier Diary' in *CEJL I* quickly dispels this misconception. She writes that Orwell's 'novels and later essays [from 1940 onward] present an obsessive concern with the danger of non-involving stances'.⁸⁸ These

being crucial tenets in her overall thesis, Hunter feels free to ignore almost exclusively essays written before 1940. As a measure of the warping effect this has on her analysis, she fails to consider either 'A Hanging' or 'Shooting an Elephant'.

Patrick Reilly's otherwise lucid 1986 study, *George Orwell: The Age's Adversary*, hides Orwell's light as an essayist under a bushel. As already acknowledged, Reilly describes Orwell on the book's first page as 'a great essayist', but oddly does not designate the individual essays he later examines. Instead, Reilly uses the page numbers in *CEJL* as a reference for the essays. This has the curious effect that, while Orwell's essays are quoted from frequently, the reader must refer to *CEJL* to find out the name of the particular essay to which Reilly is referring. Submerging the essays in this way does little to substantiate Reilly's assessment of their quality.

Averil Gardner does designate individual essays in the chapter on Orwell's essays in her 1987 work, *George Orwell*.⁸⁹ As Jeffrey Meyers had done a decade earlier, Gardner develops a taxonomy of the essays; like Meyers, she discerns five categories, though these are slightly different from his. Gardner's categories are: the purely autobiographical; those which are partly autobiographical but concentrate on an event rather than on the narrator; those on popular culture; those concerned with arts and letters; and those recognisable as political.⁹⁰ This list hardly startles with its originality, but in fact the analysis of examples of each group is hampered hopelessly by the fact that Gardner uses only fifteen pages in which to analyse twenty years of Orwell's essays. Even so, her assessment of Orwell can be added to the list of tributes; she considers that 'no such writer since Orwell has employed [the essay] so frequently or with such distinction'.⁹¹ Her praise of Orwell as an essayist perhaps excuses the slightness of her own consideration of his essays.

Michael Sheldon's 1991 *George Orwell: The Authorised Biography* provides the most recent portrait of Orwell. Against Crick's documentary realism, Sheldon might be seen as a pointillist, adding colour and minute detail to create his image. Sheldon considers some essays not dealt with by Crick, and his literary background provokes Sheldon to indulge in literary criticism. He analyses several 'new' essays and a periodical unacknowledged by Crick.⁹² As with Crick, the complexity of the subject requires that certain areas are glossed over; both, after all, are biographies. So, while Sheldon acknowledges the essays and the periodicals in which they first appear, he fails to give due weight to the

periodical medium, or the messages Orwell sent in essay form through that medium.

The foregoing survey of the critical literature on Orwell's essays reveals their continued neglect as a whole. Certainly, particular essays, such as 'A Hanging' or 'Shooting an Elephant' have come to be recognised as classics of the genre. Such essays as 'Why I Write' are deemed crucial to an understanding of the interplay between literary and political imperatives in Orwell's work. For those inclined toward psychoanalysis, on the other hand, the Dickensian account of prep school misery set down in 'Such, Such Were The Joys' offers privileged access to the writer's long-standing repressions. Despite the critical attention given to individual examples, however, the essays as a body of work have yet to receive due academic attention.

While many of Orwell's essays have been ignored, even those which supposedly warrant analysis have suffered from the tendency of critics to decontextualise them. This results in part from Orwell's massive posthumous reputation; as the product of a writer on the road to secular canonisation, the essays are read as transcending their humble beginnings in the ghetto of marginal periodicals. One aim of this thesis is to advertise the roots of the essays, not to cause embarrassment, but to emphasise the crucial role periodicals played in the formation and publication of Orwell's ideas.

The Approach and Argument of the Thesis

Simply analysing Orwell's essays published between 1931 and 1941 as discrete pieces of literature would prove inadequate and distorting. Many pieces were specific responses to particular arguments and situations; elaborating these broader aspects reinstates Orwell in relation to his opponents and allies. As respective chapters will show, many of Orwell's arguments derive from – or are reactions to – the strongly argued ideas of others. Without this context, especially in the period covered by this thesis, Orwell's status as a minor, struggling writer can be ignored or misconstrued. Given the knowledge that the Eric Blair who published occasional essays in *The Adelphi* in 1931 would go on to write two of the most widely read political fictions in history, it is tempting to see signs of greatness from the beginning. It is also tempting to assume that Blair's contemporaries, recognising those same signs, accorded his writing the

respect greatness deserves; such was not the case. In this instance, at least, temptation should be avoided.

Orwell's essays are analysed here under five rubrics: Imperialism; the Spanish Civil War; Totalitarianism; Socialism, and Literature. Approaching the respective topics chronologically allows for the interpretation of developments, revisions or contradictions in Orwell's attitudes over the period. To give one example: Chapter Two charts the course of Orwell's position on imperialism from an initial moral standpoint, through a period in which he assesses imperialism in economic terms, to an understanding which integrates both elements.

The five categories are not mutually exclusive; many of Orwell's essays contain a cluster of ideas which defy simplistic pigeon-holing. Consequently, certain essays are considered in more than one chapter, the better to illuminate different facets. At the same time, the comparison of Orwell's views with other political and literary writers affords a detailed appraisal of the relationship between Orwell's writing and thought with those of his contemporaries.

Recognising the importance of the specific periodical in which an essay appeared adds a vital dimension to an understanding of Orwell as an essayist. Several times an essay was written at the request of the editor. Orwell also tailors his argument to the audience of the periodical; sometimes to convince, sometimes to shock. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, for example, he can be seen simultaneously to present different arguments to different audiences.⁹³ Orwell announces his political allegiance in one periodical, denounces his political enemies in another. A proper assessment of Orwell as an essayist results from the reinstatement of the periodical as a crucial platform for his views.

Before Orwell's specific essays can be investigated, an understanding of the essay as a literary form needs be established. Chapter One begins with an examination of the problems posed to criticism by the essay, surveying the attempts of commentators to deal with the form's protean qualities. Against those critics who look back to Montaigne as the sole yardstick by which essays can be measured, in Chapter One it is argued that, though Montaigne gave the form its name, he did not exhaust its possibilities.

Proof of the flexibility of the essay comes with the development of the essay periodical in the seventeenth century. The new medium extends the scope of the essay, the periodical being a creature not of the private study but of the arena of public debate. Chapter One provides an

overview of the essay periodical from its beginnings, through the initial flowering in such influential organs as *The Tatler*, and into its important role in the nineteenth century. This prepares the way for a more detailed consideration of the periodical in the 1930s and early 1940s.

The argument put forward in Chapter One goes beyond a history of the periodical. The birth and growth of the medium are analysed in terms of public debate, as set out in the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas's concept of a 'public sphere'.⁹⁴ Habermas sees modern public debate as developing contemporaneously with the rise of bourgeois liberalism at around the turn of the eighteenth century. For Habermas, that century marks the high point of a form of open public discussion which found the periodical an invaluable means for the transmission of ideas, opinion, and critique on social, literary and political matters. Detecting an inexorable commercialisation of the print medium in the nineteenth century, Habermas notes the consequent decline of the classical bourgeois public sphere in our own century.

Decline need not signal a complete disintegration. While it is both useful and necessary not to overrate the importance of the periodicals in which Orwell's essays were published, their place even in a deteriorating public sphere deserves attention. While the influence of the periodical certainly declines in the twentieth century, a variety of journals still played an active part in public debate. As Stephen Koss notes in his massive study, *The Rise and Fall of The Political Press in Britain*, while newspapers in the twentieth century sloughed off their politically partisan skins, the 'journals of opinion – the *New Statesman*, the *Spectator* . . . *Time and Tide* . . . Claud Cockburn's *The Week* . . . appropriated many of the critical functions of the political press'.⁹⁵ Orwell's essays operate in this world.

Chapter One creates a framework within which to consider those essays. Chapter Two considers Orwell's approach to imperialism, the ostensible topic of his first major essay, 'A Hanging'. Written in 1931, 'A Hanging' provides a starting point for the analysis of Orwell's rhetorical strategies, especially his use of the perspective of the eye-witness. Orwell's years in Burma cause some critics to see 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant' as slightly embroidered autobiography. The analysis in this chapter challenges such assumptions, foregrounding the extent to which Orwell's early conception of imperialism is based on moral, rather than economic, foundations. Implicit in these early essays is Orwell's Anglo-centric perception, something later jettisoned, but then recovered in a modified form.

Orwell's early moral reading of imperialism places him at odds with more radical young writers of the period; Chapter Two charts the differences. The adoption of an economic model of imperialism does not come until Orwell joins the quasi-Marxist I.L.P. in 1938. Neglected essays such as 'Why I Join The I.L.P.', 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'Marrakech' attest to the development of his ideas, while an examination of the I.L.P.'s weekly paper, *New Leader*, shows how those ideas followed the party line in the late thirties.

Fully delineating Orwell's pre-war radicalism highlights his shift in perception in such wartime essays as 'My Country Right or Left' and 'The Lion and The Unicorn'. In the former, Orwell invokes the trappings of nineteenth century imperialism in his call for the defence of Britain. Orwell argues for Indian independence in 'The Lion and the Unicorn', though he still manages to justify the British Empire. The essays examined in Chapter Two provide an illuminating introduction to the scope and complexity of Orwell's thought.

Chapter Three focuses on the Spanish Civil War, a watershed in Orwell's political development. The attempts at muffling Orwell's views on Spain, by such influential figures as Kingsley Martin and Victor Gollancz, are considered in terms of a working public sphere, as is Orwell's ability to get his heterodox views published in a variety of periodicals. The chapter examines the effect these machinations had on Orwell's perception of the literary and political situation in Britain. In contrast to those analyses which concentrate exclusively on his now-classic study, *Homage To Catalonia*, the initial failure of the book is highlighted. Yet, while *Homage To Catalonia* was still in embryonic form, Orwell employed the periodical essay as the means of publicising his perceptions. In his own time, more people read Orwell's essays on Spain than read his book.

In Chapter Three, Orwell's first shot in the propaganda war, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', is considered, as well as two essays largely lost to critical view since their publication: 'Eye-Witness in Barcelona' and 'Caesarean Section in Spain'. The former essay, though published at the same time as 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', presents a different reading of the situation in Spain, illustrating Orwell's utilisation of periodicals to argue different points. Analysing 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' and 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' allows for a richer discussion of Orwell's use of the eye-witness viewpoint, a stance more complex than normally credited.

In the second 'lost' essay, 'Caesarean Section in Spain', published in 1939, Orwell considers the Spanish Civil War in terms of the general threat to democracy. The change in approach can partly be explained by

Orwell's realignment of priorities as the war swung away from the grasp of the Republicans. Just as importantly, however, 'Caesarean Section in Spain' first appeared in the Workers' Educational Association periodical, *The Highway*; Orwell's argument centres on workers as defenders of democracy.

Totalitarianism is considered in Chapter Four. In *The Road To Wigan Pier* Orwell adopts the unusual (though not unique) position of accepting and trying to analyse the allure of Fascism; Communism is dismissed as an irritating distraction. Spain changes these perceptions: his contact with Fascism nearly costs Orwell his life, while Communist persecution of ostensible allies sullies his view of the ideology and its supporters. The perception, gained in Spain, of similarities between the two ideologies, informs much of his later thought on totalitarianism. Most notably, as evidenced in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' and 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', Orwell comes to recognise the control of language and information as amongst totalitarianism's defining characteristics. His attacks on the press coverage in Spain (by the Left and the Right) and his fears over the future of literature register his alarm at the potential for the silencing of debate.

The role of periodicals in the left-wing debates over Fascism and Communism is highlighted in Chapter Four. While almost by definition anti-Fascist, not all the Left periodicals adopt the same line in attacking the ideology. Similarly, Communism generates volatile argument, especially as symbolised in the Soviet Union; defenders and attackers could be found in *Left Review* and *Left News*. Orwell's own antagonism jibes well with the internecine disputes between his own I.L.P. and the Communist Party of Great Britain. Much of the sound and fury of these disputes is expended through the pages of the respective publications of the parties: the *New Leader* and the *Daily Worker*. An assessment of the complexities of the situation is well served by the public sphere model.

Chapter Four also charts the windshift in Orwell's position with the outbreak of the Second World War. In his 1939 essay 'Not Counting Niggers' he equates Fascist Germany with the British Empire; by late 1940, in 'My Country Right or Wrong', Orwell pledges support for Britain against the Fascist threat. He develops his argument further in three essays published in the *Left News*, the periodical of the Left Book Club. None of the essays ('Our Opportunity'; 'Fascism and Democracy' and 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?') have received critical attention; all

defend an admittedly flawed Britain against the totalitarian alternative Orwell sees as imminent.

If Orwell fears Fascism and derides Communism, he flies the flag of Socialism throughout the thirties and into the war years; this adherence provides the topic of Chapter Five. Even so, Orwell's essays reveal a changing understanding of the basis, potential, and limits of Socialism. *The Road to Wigan Pier* again provides a means of comparison, for Orwell sketches out several ideas which recur or which are abandoned, and later reclaimed: the belief that Socialism provides the only defence against Fascism; that Socialism must derive from the history and culture of Britain, and that Socialism must jettison materialist theory and jargon and instead understand mass psychology, something he detects in the success of Fascism.

The Spanish Civil War marks the beginning of a radicalisation in Orwell's position, exemplified in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'Democracy in the British Army'. These essays, appearing in different periodicals in 1938 and 1939, reinforce an understanding of Orwell's use of periodicals to broadcast his views to distinct audiences. Indeed, not recognising these differences distorts the arguments contained in the respective essays. As before, the Second World War obliges Orwell to reconsider his position on Socialism. 'My Country Right or Left' signals the immediate result of that reconsideration, Orwell arguing the need for patriotic Socialism. The three *Left News* essays referred to above modify but do not fundamentally change this argument, which receives its most extended treatment in Orwell's long 1941 essay, 'The Lion and the Unicorn'.

The essays Orwell writes for the *Left News*, along with 'The Lion and The Unicorn', reveal him cultivating new areas of the public sphere. Writing in the *Left News* gives Orwell access to a mass readership denied him for much of the late thirties and early forties. 'The Lion and The Unicorn' marked the first in the 'Searchlight Series' edited by Orwell and T.R.Fyvel, a series aimed at quickly placing before the public practical plans for the future. Along with Victor Gollancz's Victory Books series (begun the year before) the Searchlight Books venture indicates Orwell's sense that the arena of public debate needed expansion.

'On the whole the literary history of the thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics'; so writes Orwell in his provocative 1940 essay, 'Inside the Whale'. Yet he is not averse to mixing politics with literature, and literature is the topic of Chapter Six. Surprisingly, however, given the rich variety of debates concerning

the role of writers in the thirties, 'Inside the Whale' is Orwell's first major contribution; more a last salvo for the thirties than an opening barrage. Chapter Six details the earlier arguments of other writers, particularly in such periodicals as *Left Review*, *Fact* and *Cambridge Left Review*, who actively canvass for the integration of the political and the literary.

Not all literary periodicals in the thirties and early forties were politically driven; some, like *New Writing*, *New Verse* and *Horizon*, consciously attempt to stand aloof from the political fray. The model of a public sphere allows the consideration of both types of literary periodical, as well as situating Orwell in the debates over the relationship between literature and politics. He tends away from the overt political allegiance of such contemporaries as C. Day Lewis and (as the mood takes him) Stephen Spender; witness Orwell's refusal to reply to the *Left Review*-inspired questionnaire 'Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War'. Yet his attack, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, on the failure of Socialist writers to produce works of true merit, indicates a recognition of the socio-political aspect of literature.

One of Orwell's chief concerns, expressed most vigorously in 'Inside the Whale', is political conformism in literature. Striking the balance between literary and political imperatives informs many of his essays in the years to 1941. In addition, the threat posed to literature by the prospect of totalitarian dominance gave his own fears a general applicability. Chapter Six focuses upon such neglected essays as 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', in which Orwell considers his duties and future as a writer, and 'Literature and Totalitarianism', where the future of literature itself is examined.

Pessimistic though Orwell is in 1941, his attitudes on a whole variety of issues have changed enormously over the decade; they were to change again in the decade to follow. The temporal boundaries of this thesis merely mark stages in Orwell's development as a writer, rather than definitive moments in his life or work. Even so, between 1931 and 1941 Orwell tackles a vast range of topics, and many of the arguments worked through in that time are visible in his later writing. Attention to this early period provides an antidote to the teleology which perceives the germ of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in every word written. In contextualising Orwell's essays, the thesis will show the extent to which Orwell was merely one writer amongst many in the first decade of his career. Prising the essays from the four volumes of *CEJL* also allows an examination of the incoherences, contradictions and revisions

in Orwell's work. Consequently, he can be seen as a writer sometimes sure-footed, sometimes stumbling in his analyses and arguments.

Recognising the importance of a wide variety of periodicals to the publication of Orwell's views reinstates the medium to its proper place in Orwell studies. Furthermore, employing Habermas's model of a public sphere of discourse will permit a more general understanding of the complexity of debate between sections of the British left-wing in the thirties and early forties. In the period covered in this thesis, no place in the literary pantheon was vouchsafed for Orwell; rather than depicting him as a solitary, saintly figure, immune to the ravages of literary fashion or political expediency, the approach taken in this thesis will recognise him as one voice in a noisy public arena.

Footnotes

- 1 Irving Howe, 'George Orwell: "As The Bones Know"', *Harpers Magazine* (January 1969), 98–103 (p. 98).
- 2 T.R.Fyvel, *George Orwell: A Personal Memoir* (London, 1982), p. 174.
- 3 See, for example, Jacintha Buddicom, *Eric and Us: A Remembrance* (London, 1974). For a more useful retrospective (based on a wide variety of interviews) see Stephen Wadham, *Remembering Orwell* (Middlesex, 1984).
- 4 Examples of antagonistic appraisals of Orwell either as writer or human include: *Inside The Myth. Orwell: Views From The Left*, edited by Christopher Norris (London, 1984); Daphne Patai, *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology* (Amherst, Massachusetts, 1984). Interestingly, as the titles of both these books suggest, the myth and mystique surrounding Orwell have come to be aspects worth targetting in their own right. John Rodden's comprehensive study, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St. George' Orwell* (New York, 1989), goes a stage further, taking as its focus the amazing variety of attempts at praising or burying Orwell.
- 5 Michael Shelden, *George Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (London, 1991).
- 6 Critiques of 1984 appear in (amongst others): Frederic Warburg, *All Authors Are Equal: The Publishing Life of Frederic Warburg 1936–71* (London, 1973), pp. 92–120; Laurence Brander, *George Orwell* (London, 1954), pp. 183–204; *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Jeffrey Meyers (London, 1974), pp. 247–93; *George Orwell's 1984*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York, 1987).
- 7 Jeffrey and Valerie Meyers, *George Orwell: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (New York, 1977).
- 8 Jeffrey and Valerie Meyers, p.ix.
- 9 Hakan Ringbom, *George Orwell as Essayist: A Stylistic Analysis* (Abo, Finland, 1973).

- 10 Ringbom, pp. 12–13.
- 11 Ringbom, p. 19.
- 12 Patrick Reilly, *George Orwell: The Age's Adversary* (London, 1986), p.ix; David Wykes, *A Preface To George Orwell* (London, 1987), p. 109.
- 13 J.R.Hammond, *A George Orwell Companion: A guide to the novels, documentaries and essays* (London, 1982), p. 226.
- 14 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London, 1980) p.xv.
- 15 Bloom, p. 1.
- 16 Rodden, p.x.
- 17 Hammond, p. 187.
- 18 *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, (hereafter *CEJL*), edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London, 1968).
- 19 Sheldon gives details of the edition, hereafter *Complete Orwell*, on p. 495.
- 20 George Orwell, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' (London, 1941).
- 21 George Orwell, diary entry, 28 August 1941. *CEJL II*, p. 409.
- 22 Robert Waller, review of *New Writing* No.2, in *The Adelphi* (December 1936) 187–8 (p. 188).
- 23 George Orwell [as Eric A. Blair], 'The Spike', *The Adelphi* (April 1931), pp. 24–33. *CEJL I*, pp. 36–45.
- 24 George Orwell [as Eric A. Blair], 'A Hanging', *The Adelphi* (August, 1931), pp. 417–22. *CEJL I*, pp. 44–8.
- 25 See Crick, pp. 125–31; Sheldon, pp. 147–50.
- 26 The problems of establishing the size of respective readerships are considered in Chapter One.
- 27 David Lodge, 'George Orwell's "A Hanging" and "Michael Lake Describes"', in *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London, 1977), pp. 9–17.
- 28 Crick, p. 17.
- 29 *Shooting an Elephant* (London, 1950).
- 30 Ian Willison, 'George Orwell: Some Materials for a Bibliography' (unpublished dissertation, University of London, 1953), pp. 34–5.
- 31 Willison, p. 75.
- 32 Willison, pp. 38–9.
- 33 Orwell derided it as a 'silly little . . . book' in an October 1947 letter to Julian Symons; see *CEJL IV*, 380–1 (p. 380).
- 34 The columns (which include 'Confessions of a Book Reviewer' and 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad') emphasise Orwell's quirky 'Englishness' at the expense of the political polemicist.
- 35 *England Your England* (London, 1953).
- 36 Crick, p. 17, describes the essay as 'polemical . . . one cannot assume that it is literally true'. Sheldon, on the other hand, blithely takes the essay at face value, using it as the basis for Chapters Two and Three of his biography, pp. 26–62.
- 37 George Orwell, 'Such, Such Were the Joys', *Partisan Review* (September – October 1952), pp. 505–15. *CEJL IV*, pp. 330–69.
- 38 Essays first republished in *England Your England* included 'Why I Write'. Though not chronologically the first of the essays, 'Why I Write' headed the contents, a strategy repeated in *CEJL*.
- 39 Reinforcing a sense of 'old wine in new bottles', *Selected Essays*

- (1957) was re-issued as *'Inside the Whale' and Other Essays* in 1960.
- 40 'Inside the Whale', for example, appeared in *Shooting an Elephant*, *George Orwell: A Collection of Essays and Selected Essays* within the space of four years.
- 41 Sheldon provides the most recent example. 'Why I Write' is treated as a manifesto as early as page 4, and is invoked repeatedly (and anachronistically) throughout the book. 'Shooting an Elephant' is given huge psychological import on pp. 115-8. Sheldon takes as a given that the narrator is Orwell. The problems with this reading of the essay are considered in Chapter Two.
- 42 Sonia Orwell, 'Introduction', in *CEJL* 1, xv-xx (pp.xvii-xviii).
- 43 Sonia Orwell, p.xix.
- 44 Sonia Orwell, p.xix.
- 45 Other writers asked included Neil Gunn, Henry Miller and Rayner Heppenstall; Miller did not submit an answer. Orwell's explanation appeared in the last issue of the short-lived periodical: *Gangrel* No.4 (Summer 1946), pp. 5-10.
- 46 Sonia Orwell, p.xvii.
- 47 Sonia Orwell, p.xvii.
- 48 The first and third of these war-time essays were deemed good enough by Victor Gollancz to include in his 1941 polemic, *The Betrayal of The Left*. The essays and the book are considered in Chapters Four and Five.
- 49 An exception to this rule might be the broad-based B.B.C. audience of *The Listener*.
- 50 Q.D.Leavis, review of *Inside the Whale*, *Scrutiny* (September 1940), 173-6; Edmund Wilson, review of *Critical Essays*, *New Yorker* 25 May 1946, 82-4.
- 51 Wyndham Lewis, *The Writer and The Absolute* (London, 1952), p. 184.
- 52 Laurence Brander, *George Orwell* (London, 1954). Brander devotes 11 pages to the essays; pp. 25-36.
- 53 Brander, pp. 37-57.
- 54 John Atkins, *George Orwell: A Literary Study* (London, 1954).
- 55 Christopher Hollis, *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and his Works* (London, 1956), Chapter XV, pp. 182-7.
- 56 Richard Rees, *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* (London, 1961). Rees and Orwell had both been at Eton. Rees also edited *The Adelphi* at several times in the thirties.
- 57 Rees, p. 7.
- 58 George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell* (Boston, 1966).
- 59 This point will be dealt with in Chapter Two.
- 60 Jenni Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler* (London, 1968). B.T.Oxley's short study, *George Orwell* (London, 1967) can be added to the list of minor works which integrate - rather than examine - Orwell's essays.
- 61 Rodden, p. 149.
- 62 George Steiner, review of *CEJL*, *New Yorker* (March 1969), pp. 139-51. Cited in Meyers, *Critical Heritage*, pp. 363-73. The page numbers for quotations are taken from Meyers; p. 363.

- 63 Steiner, p. 364.
- 64 Peter Sedgewick, review of *CEJL*, *Socialist Worker*, 9 November 1968, p. 3.
- 65 Conor Cruise O'Brien, review of *CEJL*, *The Listener* 12 December 1968, pp. 797-8.
- 66 Mary McCarthy, review of *CEJL*, *The New York Review of Books* (30 January 1969), pp. 3-6.
- 67 Rodden, p. 149.
- 68 Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (London, 1971); revised edition, 1984.
- 69 *The World of George Orwell*, edited by Miriam Gross (London, 1971).
- 70 David L. Kubal, *Outside the Whale: George Orwell's Art and Politics* (London, 1972). For the analysis of 'The Lion and The Unicorn', see pp. 29-35.
- 71 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell* (London, 1972). See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of the problems of 'A Hanging' as autobiography.
- 72 Alan Sandison, *The Last Man in Europe: An Essay on George Orwell* (London, 1974), p. 6.
- 73 *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Raymond Williams (New Jersey, 1974); Alex Zwerdling, *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven, 1974).
- 74 John Wain, 'George Orwell as a Writer of Polemic' in *Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Williams, pp. 89-102.
- 75 Jeffrey Meyers, *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1975); Jeffrey Meyers, *A Reader's Guide To George Orwell* (London, 1975).
- 76 Meyers, *Reader's Guide*, p. 49.
- 77 Meyers, *Reader's Guide*, pp. 49-50.
- 78 Meyers, in *Reader's Guide*, p. 9, states that both Orwell and Johnson were 'independent . . . patriotic . . . quintessentially English'. Whether either would enjoy the comparison is a moot point.
- 79 For the most part, Crick treats the essays as suspect biographical material.
- 80 Crick, pxxvi.
- 81 Hammond, 'Part III: The Essays', pp. 185-227.
- 82 To a large extent, Orwell and his writings were seen as tightly interwoven; dissection was painful and difficult.
- 83 Patai, p. 14, considered this 'an indentifiable "ideological cluster" at the heart of this angry and contradictory writer'.
- 84 Examples of the ground covered include Deidre Beddoe, 'Hindrances and Help-Meets: Women in the Writings of George Orwell', pp. 139-54, and Stuart Hall, 'Conjuring Leviathan: Orwell on the State', pp. 217-41.
- 85 Lynette Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search For a Voice* (Milton Keynes, 1984), pp. 108-160.
- 86 Hunter, p. 108.
- 87 Hunter, p. 108.
- 88 Hunter, p. 109.
- 89 Averil Gardner, *George Orwell* (Boston, 1987).
- 90 Gardner, pp. 85-6.

- 91 Gardner, p. 83.
- 92 The essays are 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' and 'Catastrophic Gradualism'. The first is analysed in Chapter Three of this thesis, while the second falls outside the boundaries mapped here. Sheldon also mentions the periodical *Controversy* in passing; this thesis considers *Controversy* (and Orwell's links to it) at length.
- 93 These are dealt with in Chapter Three.
- 94 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Massachusetts, 1989).
- 95 Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of The Political Press in Britain. Volume Two: The Twentieth Century* (London, 1984), pp. 497-8.

The Essay

[A] term so elastic means little or nothing, just because it means anything. If we can call Locke's great work [*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*] and Lamb's dissertation on roast pigs alike essays, we have in effect emptied the word of content.

Hugh Walker, *The English Essay and Essayists*.¹

The general Purpose of the Paper is to expose the false Arts of Life, to pull off the Disguises of Cunning, Vanity, and Affectation, and to recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, our Discourse and our Behaviour.

Dedication to the first collected edition of *The Tatler*.²

In some ways, the [nineteen] thirties were the great age of the weeklies. All the young writers who wished to make a reputation as literary figures or even as budding politicians looked to the weeklies as the natural place in which they could establish themselves.

Kingsley Martin, *Editor*.³

Studies of George Orwell's work are often founded upon a particular perception or image of the man, the argument being that defining the writer facilitates an understanding of his writing. The numerous (often contradictory) portraits produced of Orwell, however, suggest the difficulty of precise definition.⁴ While the approach adopted in this thesis privileges context over biography, the problem of definition remains; here it lies in the term 'essay', a literary form which frustrates simple description. Definitions which attempt inclusiveness tend towards an irritating vagueness, while those aiming to render essential qualities of the essay prove inadequate for the variety of pieces which are labelled, or which label themselves, as such.

In Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, for example, the consideration of the essay as 'a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, undigested piece, not a regular and orderly performance' provokes more questions than it answers – what is meant by 'loose', 'irregular', 'undigested', 'orderly'?⁵

The entry in J.A. Cuddon's recent *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* reveals that two hundred years of scholarship have not lessened definitional difficulties:

essay (F *essai* 'attempt') A composition, usually in prose (Pope's *Moral Essays* in verse are an exception), which may be of only a few hundred words (like Bacon's *Essays*) or of book length (like Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) and which discusses, formally or informally, a topic or a variety of topics. It is one of the most flexible and adaptable of all literary forms.⁶

After Cuddon's qualifications in the first sentence, the explanation in the second barely seems necessary.

The implicit exasperation in the face of the essay's protean qualities extends beyond dictionaries (which must obey the limits of space) to full-length studies. Hugh Walker's complaint, cited above, is echoed by that of Marie Hamilton Law in *The English Familiar Essay in the Early Nineteenth Century*. Law laments that 'a definition that should embrace such a variety of composition . . . would necessarily be so loose as to be no definition at all'.⁷ More recently still, Richmond Bond declares that the 'use and abuse of the term *essay* has become a standard illustration of critical resilience or unutility [sic]'.⁸

The dearth of recent major studies of the essay suggest critical defeat in the face of an elusive form. Walker's survey dates from 1915, while Law's was originally published in 1934.⁹ Beyond these works, the essay has attracted little large-scale interest by academics writing in English. Considerations of the formal properties of the essay lie buried in studies of acknowledged masters of the genre, such as Montaigne and Bacon.¹⁰ These, naturally enough, concentrate upon the individual qualities of their subject's work. Broad discussion of the development of the essay in the four centuries since Montaigne's and Bacon's essays lies outside the briefs of such studies.

The difficulties in defining the essay threaten to complicate an examination of Orwell's essays, especially if the formidable figure of Orwell is given less than paramount importance. Recourse to the security of *OED* definitions provides only temporary succour. There, the definition of the essay as a 'short composition on any particular subject' enables the inclusion of most of what are accepted as essays in the Orwell corpus, though it would exclude Locke. The same definition, however, might exclude (depending on a definition of 'short') Orwell's

sixty-page piece, 'The Lion and The Unicorn'. Yet that work finds a place in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, is labelled an essay by Raymond Williams, and gets listed as such in Bernard Crick's biography.¹¹ Clearly, in order to analyse Orwell's essays, a workable model of the form must be established.

In this chapter, the essay will be examined not as a form defined by topic, length or tone, but as a questioning and critical process. This approach accords with the etymology of the French root which, as Cuddon notes in his definition, signals an 'attempt'. A more sophisticated analysis of the essay along these lines can be found in short pieces written by the Hungarian literary critic and theorist Georg Lukács and the German philosopher Theodor Adorno. Lukács views the essay as allowing limited but privileged access to a larger totality.¹² Adorno conceives of the essay differently, classifying it as 'the critical form *par excellence*; specifically, it constructs the immanent criticism of cultural artifacts; . . . it is the critique of ideology'.¹³

The relevance of any of this to the analysis of the essays of George Orwell might seem tenuous. The questions raised by both Adorno and Lukács, however, provide the basis for a more systematic analysis of the essay in general and Orwell's essays in particular. Most obviously, the critical process of the essay accords with Orwell's preferred method of argument. Orwell repeatedly defines his position not by carefully constructing a well-fortified redoubt, but by laying siege to the defences of others. A point Orwell makes in the essay 'Charles Dickens' is illuminating in this regard, for he writes of Dickens that 'one can define his position more easily if one starts by deciding what he was *not*'.¹⁴ Orwell does not build systematic arguments so much as attack the arguments of others. The essay form provides him with a potent and ready weapon.

A conception of the essay based solely on a perceived critical function has obvious limitations, for the bulk of what are normally described as 'familiar' essays, exemplified in England by the writings of Charles Lamb, cannot be viewed as critical in a way that might satisfy Adorno. Accepting that shortcoming, this chapter sets out to show the extent to which the lack of system or incompleteness of Orwell's essays are essential critical attributes. As opposed to the fully worked out thesis, in the essay vigorous arguments can be set out without the need for complete substantiation. Much of the force of Orwell's most powerful essays comes from his deft use of this fact.

Foregrounding the process of questioning does not entail complete neglect of considerations of form. The process requires some vehicle, and that vehicle has a history. The development of the periodical essay, the form most used by Orwell, must be considered. This consideration in turn requires an analysis of the history of the periodical and a means of conceptualising the periodical's place in public debate. The work of another Continental scholar, the German philosopher and social critic Jurgen Habermas, provides a starting point for investigation. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas posits the development of modern public debate through what he labels the 'classical bourgeois public sphere'.¹⁵ Habermas argues that this sphere developed in parts of eighteenth-century Europe in tandem with the rise of the bourgeoisie. In a short article on the public sphere he contends that, in attempting to overturn the entrenched monarchical authority, the emerging class utilised 'intellectual newspapers' and 'moralistic and critical journals . . . [to debate] that public authority on the general rules of social intercourse'.¹⁶

This argument seems borne out by the Dedication to the collected edition of the seminal eighteenth-century periodical, *The Tatler*, quoted at the head of this chapter. The proposal to 'expose the false Arts of Life . . . pull off the Disguises of Cunning . . . [and] recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, our Discourse and our Behaviour' excludes little from the catalogue of human failings. Yet the Dedication also illustrates the essentially public function *The Tatler* claimed for itself.

Habermas charts the development of the bourgeois public sphere through its highpoint in the eighteenth century to its situation of relative decline in the twentieth century. Decline does not, however, signal demise. Stephen Koss's comment, cited in the Introduction to this thesis, that from the 1930s periodicals took on some of the critical functions abandoned by the political press, suggests that the medium remained resilient beyond its heyday. Kingsley Martin's observation, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that the period was the great age of weeklies, reinforces a sense of the lingering importance of periodicals.

Martin's hindsight is distorted somewhat by rose-coloured spectacles, and the number of 'budding politicians' who bloomed might have been negligible, but the success of such journals as Martin's own *New Statesman and Nation* is difficult to deny. Admittedly, the majority of periodicals for which Orwell wrote between 1931 and 1941 could hardly be said to have had substantial influence. Nevertheless, they did provide

an outlet for what was often heated debate. Situating Orwell's essays within this periodical culture will show the extent to which Orwell's ideas were both publicised in, and modified by, the periodicals in which he wrote.

This chapter, then, brings together several elements. It includes a discussion of the problems of defining the essay. The development of the essay, especially the periodical variant, and the periodical as a medium of public debate are examined. This examination integrates Habermas's notion of the public sphere. Finally, and importantly, the chapter establishes the literary, political and cultural context in which Orwell published his essays. The delineation of this context will allow the essays to be analysed in subsequent chapters not as the discrete works of a single and singular writer, but as entries in broad-ranging, vigorous and ongoing public debates.

The Essay: Problems of Definition and the Importance of Incompleteness

The problems of defining the essay have been hinted at. One response to these difficulties involves a return to the works of Michel Montaigne, who coined the label *Essais* for his collection of short discursive pieces published in 1580. Given this approach, once a father figure has been established, the family tree of the essay can be more easily set out. Francis Bacon would seem Montaigne's obvious heir in England. The first edition of Bacon's essays, published seventeen years after Montaigne's, acknowledge a debt both in the title and within the text. As did Montaigne in France, Bacon set a benchmark of quality for the form in his native land.

On even a superficial reading, however, distinct differences between the two essayists in tone, style and subject matter are evident. Montaigne's discursiveness, his conversational tone find little parallel in Bacon's aphoristic, didactic pieces. The titles of Bacon's first and third editions emphasise this difference. In both *Essayes, Religious Meditations, Places of perswasion and diswassion* and *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, the latter parts of the respective titles are meant to be taken very seriously. In contrast, as A.M.Boase notes, Montaigne's writings were 'called *essais* absolutely, without

any further description', indicative of wide-ranging thought.¹⁷ Bacon's essays function more as paternalistic counselling. Bacon is not so much Montaigne's rightful heir as his bastard son.

In Hugh Walker's estimation, Bacon's position as the father-figure of the essay in England can be challenged further by the fact that he sired 'no successor of his own sort except [Ben] Jonson and [John] Selden'.¹⁸ If progeny are necessary to denote fatherhood, however, Montaigne's own position becomes shaky. Boase argues that 'with the exceptions of René Francois, Sainct-Sernin and the two translations of Bacon, we have no French use of *essais* as a title for prose between Montaigne and Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode* [printed in 1637]'.¹⁹ Boase highlights the early predominance of verse essays in French, as well as noting the publication by King James VI of Scotland of *Essayes of a Prentice in the Divine Art of Poesy* in 1584, thirteen years before Bacon's use of the title.²⁰

The importance of this literary paternity suit to an understanding of the essay in general lies not in the truth or falsehood of particular claims, but in the fact that the essay can be seen to diversify and develop almost from the moment of its conception. Even the idea of Montaigne providing the spark is contentious, an early doubter being Bacon himself. In an unpublished dedication to the 1612 edition of his own *Essays* Bacon invokes earlier influences than Montaigne in writing:

The word is late, but the thing is ancient. For Seneca's epistles to Lucilius, if one mark them well, are but Essays, that is, dispersed meditations.²¹

Attempts to define the essay by recourse to a specific historical ideal must acknowledge that two of the earliest and greatest of essayists constructed different models.

A recognition of this fact challenges the valorisation of certain types of essay by Hugh Walker and Marie Hamilton Law. Recognising the problems of defining the essay, both Walker and Law accept as essays any claimants to the title, before crudely categorising these in terms of an ideal. Law's argument has particular relevance to the periodical essay and will be discussed at length later in the chapter. Walker, displaying his exasperation by admitting the tactic to be a 'last resort', classifies essays into two groups: 'essays *par excellence*', as well as those

compositions to which custom has assigned the name, but which agree only in being comparatively short . . . and in being more or less incomplete . . . [Such] essays do not strictly belong to a separate literary form; the historical essay is an incomplete history, the philosophical essay might expand into a treatise.²²

In contrast, essays *par excellence*, 'under no circumstances expand into treatises; they are complete in themselves'. Montaigne and Lamb are given as the respective French and English practitioners of this type.²³

Walker's argument is problematic, however, in that the key term of his classification, completeness, operates paradoxically. Those essays that he relegates to a lower class have, he argues, been designated as essays because their comparative shortness and incompleteness accords with the customary usage of the term. Yet, for Walker, exemplary essays are those he considers to be 'complete'. Superficially, this would argue against their being labelled essays. With the higher class of essay Walker requires 'complete' to mean entire, finished, unable to be expanded. By contrast, the second class of essay, what he describes as essays in 'a looser sense', are viewed as other forms in embryonic state.

The tangle Walker gets himself into suggests that, despite his efforts, incompleteness cannot be excluded from an understanding of the essay. Walker (perhaps unwittingly) signals this fact himself in his assessment of Bacon as, 'for sheer weight and mass of genius, the greatest' of English essayists.²⁴ Walker admits that, especially in his early writings, Bacon uses the essay in its definitional sense,

literally and precisely as an "attempt" at a subject. It was something incomplete, something which ought to bear on its face the visible markings of its unfinished condition.²⁵

Incompleteness here for Walker constitutes a kind of adolescent phase that Bacon eventually outgrew. Walker accepts that in Bacon's early essays 'the connexions [sic] are not worked out and expressed, but are implicit and can be supplied by the intelligence of an alert reader'.²⁶ The incompleteness of the form cannot be dismissed as easily as Walker might like.

For the critic Stanley Fish, in contrast, Bacon's primary concern lies not in mature presentation but 'with the *experience* that form provides'.²⁷ In Fish's view Bacon's aphorisms are essentially heuristic, calling on the

sceptical intelligence of the reader. This, he argues, has a salutary effect, for though

the content of aphorisms is not necessarily more true than the content of methodical writing . . . it minimizes the possibility that the mind . . . will take the coherence of an artful discourse for the larger coherence of objective truth.²⁸

This incompleteness might be taken to be an idiosyncrasy of Bacon's except that a similar case can be made of Montaigne's essays. Walker happily includes Montaigne amongst essayists of the ideal type. Richard Sayce argues that Montaigne's revisions of his essays constitute a fundamental feature, for

Montaigne rereads what he has written earlier and in the rereading is stimulated to new reflections which sometimes go beyond their point of departure [sic], enlarging, qualifying, setting off on a tangent, even contradicting.²⁹

Sayce considers that while for some authors the establishment of the 'definitive' version of a particular essay is important, with 'Montaigne this scarcely makes sense because each stage has equal validity, each contributes something to the moving figure'.³⁰ The extent of this revision becomes clear in the acknowledgement of Montaigne's translator, J.M. Robinson, that at his death in 1592, Montaigne left a copy of the latest edition of his essays 'with numerous corrections, and additions written on the margins, which when printed made the book half as long again as the preceding edition'.³¹

These corrections and additions are more than mere tinkering, if, as John O'Neill contends in his study of Montaigne, the essay constitutes 'an experiment in the community of truth, and not a packaging of knowledge ruled by definitions and operations'.³² O'Neill's assessment has obvious similarities with Fish's conception of Bacon. O'Neill also recognises, as Walker did of Bacon's early essays, that Montaigne's essays 'are unwelcome to the passive reader. They require that the reader share in the author's activity'.³³

Not surprisingly, given the rhetoric of active readers, communities of truth and the upsetting of rules, O'Neill conceives of the essay as 'a political instrument inasmuch as it liberates the writer and the

reader from the domination of conventional standards of clarity and communication'.³⁴ O'Neill does not consider at what point the liberation from clarity might undermine the political efficacy of the essay, and his conception of the interaction of reader and writer neglects the text itself as potentially outside the domination of authorial intention, but he does allow the essay the valuable quality of operating in a public setting.

This extended discussion of the complex genesis of the essay form may seem far removed from the essays of George Orwell. Indeed Orwell did not constantly revise his essays once they had been published. Only two collections of essays appeared in his lifetime: *Inside The Whale* in 1940 and *Critical Essays* in 1946. The later collection did contain two essays, 'Charles Dickens' and 'Boys' Weeklies' from the earlier, and 'Boys' Weeklies' had been slightly revised. Yet the repeated revisions of a single essay which so characterise a Bacon or a Montaigne are not to be found.

Orwell did utilise the incompleteness of the essay form, nevertheless, and he did revise his views. The key to this paradox lies, paradoxically, in the volumes of *CEJL*. Those essays show Orwell repeatedly returning to specific topics and refashioning and revising his views in the light of changing circumstances or perceptions. These changes could be occasioned by the arguments of others. To take the topic of the Spanish Civil War: Orwell wrote two brutally frank (if somewhat contradictory) attacks on left-wing distortions of the war in 1937, entitled 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' and 'Eye-Witness in Barcelona'. He also converted what ostensibly were reviews of books on that war into essays. In these (dealt with at length in Chapter Three) Orwell can be seen as trying to understand a complex and rapidly changing situation which does not afford easy answers. His arguments register both the need to integrate new facts, and to argue to different audiences. He returns to the subject in 1942, long after the war itself has ended, using the war as a means of understanding the necessity – and the potential failure – of struggle against new and perilous foes.

Orwell's 'revisions' took place, crucially, not within subsequent editions of collected essays but through a wide variety of periodicals. Here lies the central contrast with the essays of Bacon and Montaigne. The very titles of Bacon's essays ('Of Love', 'Of Truth', 'Of Death') suggest private meditation upon universal questions. The birth of the periodical in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth century, however, wrenches the essay from the private to the public domain. In this movement the

self-revision of the author gives way to the testing ground of public argument. The overwhelming majority of Orwell's essays were published first in periodicals. Through this medium, his views could be publicised, criticised, or, indeed, ignored.

Incompleteness: The Essay as Critique

Having suggested the importance of the essay's incompleteness, but before turning to an examination of the importance of the periodical, the arguments of Adorno and Lukács concerning the essay can be considered. In 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay', written as an introduction to his 1910 essay collection, *Soul and Form*, Lukács asks

what is an essay? What is its intended form of expression, and what are the ways and means whereby this expression is accomplished?³⁵

For Lukács the essay is inherently a critical form. He writes of 'the critique, the essay – call it provisionally what you will –', clearly recognising the terms as interchangeable.³⁶ Yet, for him, this critique has lofty motives: he argues that the greatest essayists 'always [speak] about the ultimate questions of life'.³⁷

Lukács' conception of the essay is predicated on the potential comprehension of a transcendent totality, what he labels the 'great aesthetic'. He chides Montaigne for his use of the term essay, suggesting that 'the simple modesty of this word is an arrogant conceit. The essayist dismisses his own proud hopes which sometimes lead him to believe that he has come close to the ultimate'.³⁸ Instead of this simple modesty Lukács considers that the essay form itself allows the possibility of access to a transcendent understanding. Though he considers that the 'essay strives for truth', it acts only as precursor to the 'great aesthetic'.

The 'truth' revealed by the essay remains provisional, and Lukács portrays the essayist as a John the Baptist figure, preparing the way. He writes that

the essay can calmly and proudly set its fragmentariness against the petty completeness of scientific exactitude or impressionistic

freshness; but its purest fulfilment . . . becomes powerless once the great aesthetic comes.³⁹

Despite the abstract tenor of Lukács' thought, fragmentariness, incompleteness and lack of system are central to his conception of the critical function of the essay. While he recognises that

[t]he essay is a judgement, . . . the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict (as is the case with the system) but the process of judging.⁴⁰

A similar if more polemical argument along these lines can be found in Theodor Adorno's 'The Essay As Form', which draws upon Lukács' work. Adorno argues against what he describes as the denigration and censure of the essay by the German academic establishment. The specifics of this argument are outside the concerns of this chapter, but in general terms Adorno, like Lukács, places the essay form in opposition to the 'petty completeness' of science. While science grounds and validates itself on method, Adorno writes that the essay functions as a 'critique of the system . . . accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total'.⁴¹ As with Lukács, Adorno celebrates incompleteness as inherently critical, a recognition of the tentativeness of knowledge. He judges the essay the 'critical form *par excellence* . . . it is the critique of ideology', and not surprisingly acknowledges links between the essay and rhetoric.⁴²

Though operating within the framework of European critical thought the arguments of both Lukács and Adorno are relevant to Orwell's essays. Firstly, they reinforce the centrality of incompleteness to a conception of the essay. Secondly, and more importantly, they foreground the critical function of that incompleteness. To exemplify briefly, Orwell's essay 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' is littered with unsubstantiated attacks and hyperbolic statements: the left-wing press distorts the truth more than the pro-Fascist; the communists in Spain are anti-revolutionary; Fascism will succeed in Britain because of the moral cowardice of the press.

As a carefully defined and fully worked out thesis the essay fails, but as a polemical essay, it succeeds. Much of the rhetorical strength of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' lies in what is not explained or substantiated, in the essay's incompleteness, its incitement to counter-argument: it functions to trigger debate. A necessary caveat obtains, in that polemicism may be

activated or neutralised outside the specific contexts in which the essays were first written.

The Essay and the Periodical

The debates in which Orwell participated via essays necessarily took place in public. At this point, the conception of the essay based solely on the writings of a Montaigne or a Bacon proves inadequate. The establishment of the periodical in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century marks the birth of the periodical essay, a development which allowed essayists to comment upon the social, political and cultural events of the moment.⁴³

The development of the periodical itself warrants consideration. The following study briefly traces the development of the periodical from early success in the eighteenth century, through its importance in the nineteenth century, to its relative decline in the twentieth. Such an historical survey allows a broader understanding of the marginal status of Orwell's essays when they were first published. With the benefit of hindsight and in the wake of Orwell's enormous posthumous reputation, it is instructive to realise that the periodicals in which many of his essays first appeared were established by or represented the views of a very small section of British society in the 1930s. This section, admittedly, was literate and artistically and politically active, but the subsequent importance attached to it (frequently by its own members, who had access to print far out-weighting their numbers) needs critical assessment. In this chapter, the method of assessment will be to compare the situation and status of periodicals in the 1930s with that of earlier times.

The first number of *The Tatler*, which appeared in 1709, provides a marker both for the establishment of an enduring literary form, the periodical essay, and the periodical as an active element in the literary and social environment. There were precursors to *The Tatler*, notably the *Gentleman's Journal* (1692–4) and Defoe's *Review* (1704–13). Despite these, *The Tatler*, partly as a result of its immediate popularity, is generally recognised to have stimulated a wealth of imitators. Along with its successor *The Spectator*, *The Tatler* essentially was a journal of moral reform, as evidenced by the Dedication to the first collected volume, quoted at the head of this chapter.

Despite, or because of, its moral intent, *The Tatler* for the most part eschewed politics. As Richmond Bond writes, 'In the full course of *The Tatler* the position of politics seemed relatively minor. Steele's periodical . . . did not commence as a political paper, and it never became one'.⁴⁴ Bond categorises only six issues (all from 1710) as political, and these proved so provocative that the journal 'never returned to the kind of campaign that drew heat from Tory pens'.⁴⁵ While debatable from a moral standpoint, the withdrawal from overt political commentary ensured that the periodical's circulation was not the plaything of political fashion.

If the two seminal journals of the eighteenth century preferred to skirt the dangerous eddies of political life, others plunged in. Ironically, one of these was Steele's own periodical, *The Guardian*, first published in March 1713. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, the tendency became for periodicals to attach themselves to a particular political party, if not indeed to be purpose-built for the job. Such organs inevitably attacked the positions of their opponents as well as defending and broadcasting those of their own. Walker notes, for example, 'the warfare between Smollett in "The Briton" and Wilkes in "The North Briton"'.⁴⁶ The implied vehemence, rather than the national impact of such a regional conflict, is instructive.

John Stephens, the editor of a recent collection of *The Guardian*, detects political machinations behind the sudden discontinuation of that journal and its replacement by *The Englishman*.⁴⁷ Periodicals flourished not simply as discrete organs then, but as elements in a broad environment of argument and counter-argument. The birth and rapid early development of the periodical can be most usefully understood in these wider terms. Bond has described *The Tatler* as 'the first great socio-literary journal, the first to act as a wide and true organ of the Enlightenment'.⁴⁸ Though a considerable claim, it suggests the wider implications of the growth of the periodical, and its establishment in the domain of public debate.

The birth of the periodical, however, does not mark the demise of the personal or familiar essay exemplified by Montaigne. Indeed, some critics argue that only the personal essay, which flourished under the stewardship of writers such as Charles Lamb, continued to fulfil the requirements of the genre. Marie Hamilton Law, for example, while recognising similarities between the personal and the periodical essay, keenly emphasises their differences. For Law, the 'highest type of all [essays], the one that is most certainly to be classed as pure literature

among the fine arts is the personal or the familiar essay'.⁴⁹ This she defines by foregrounding the subjectivity of the familiar essay:

personality is its keynoteThe familiar essay conveys the moods, the fantasies and whims, the chance reflections and random observations of the essayist.⁵⁰

Montaigne, Sir Thomas Browne and Abraham Cowley are lauded by Law as early exemplars of the highest form of essay, Charles Lamb as the carrier of the torch.

The difficulties in defining essays by way of an ideal have been argued earlier. Though Law accepts that certain elements of their purer counterparts can be incorporated into periodical essays, she argues that a distinction lies in the periodical essayist's 'ulterior purpose: to bring news "foreign and domestic", to afford entertainment, and to bring about a reform in morals, manners and taste'.⁵¹ The third condition almost paraphrases *The Tatler* proposal, and that periodical certainly provides fertile ground for the sinister-sounding purposes of periodical essayists.

For Law, these purposes relegate the periodical essay to a lower plane than that of the familiar essay. Like Walker, she classifies essays into two classes:

those writings which possess some distinction of thought and manner and central qualities of permanence and those that are merely topical, ephemeral, journalistic, or technical – in other words between essays on the one hand and all those articles, "papers", and treatises which burden our current periodicals, both popular and learned, and which flourish today and tomorrow are cast into the oven.⁵²

Where Walker foregrounds completeness as the defining term, Law institutes a poorly defined quality control.

Law's disdain for the topicality of the periodical is undermined by numerous examples. Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times', published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829, has been described by Raymond Williams as

a short essay . . . yet it states a general position which was to be the basis of all Carlyle's subsequent work, and which, moreover, was to

establish itself in the general thinking of many other writers, and as a major element in the tradition of English social criticism.⁵³

Walter Houghton, detailing the evolution of a series of periodical essays by Matthew Arnold into *Culture and Anarchy* notes that the book 'would never have been written had there been no periodical to provide it with growing space'.⁵⁴ Rather than being, as Law sees it, the province of the technical and the ephemeral, the periodical provided fertile ground for the planting and cultivation of ideas.

Periodicals and the Public Sphere

A sustained attempt to understand this wider context emerges from the work of the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas postulates the existence of a 'public sphere' mediating between the state and the individual. In the ideal form, individuals within this sphere are able to 'confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association, and the freedom to express and to publish their opinions'.⁵⁵ Habermas attempts to use this model as a means of analysing the history of modern public debate. He sees a public sphere developing first in Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century and soon after in France and Germany. Though Habermas detects national differences, he argues that in essence the bourgeois public sphere emerges from the fundamental challenge to established monarchical authority:

The bourgeois were private persons; as such they did not 'rule'. Their power claims against the public authority were not directed against the concentration of powers . . . instead, they undercut the principle upon which the existing rule was based. ⁵⁶

Against a division of power based on the rights of the nobility, the emerging bourgeoisie demands that power be open to 'rational-critical public debate'. Centres for this debate are the rapidly-increasing number of coffee houses, and the journals which sprang from these. While Habermas acknowledges differences between the table societies (or *Tischgesellschaften*) in Germany, the *salons* of France and the British

coffee houses, the latter two institutions at least 'were centers [sic] of criticism – literary at first, then also political'.⁵⁷ The coffee houses were not simply arenas for verbal debate, for

literature had to legitimate itself in these coffee houses . . . critical debate ignited by works of literature were soon extended to include economic and political disputes.⁵⁸

Habermas develops the link between coffee houses and periodicals beyond the conventional portrayal of genteel satire and restrained moralising, arguing that rather than merely providing an outlet for debate, the activities associated with the coffee houses modify the basis of that debate. He states this succinctly in a short article on the public sphere, arguing that members of the bourgeois

almost immediately laid claim to the officially regulated 'intellectual newspapers' for use against the public authority itself. In those journals, and in the moralistic and critical journals, they debated that public authority on the general rules of social intercourse.⁵⁹

This process itself expanded the number of constituent debaters to include

all private people, persons who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were the subject of discussion.⁶⁰

Habermas recognises the obvious, nevertheless; the vast majority of the population were either illiterate or too impoverished to afford 'even the most modest participation in the market of cultural goods'.⁶¹

Habermas traces the decline of the classical bourgeois public sphere from the highpoint of the eighteenth century. As the label suggests, the model of the bourgeois public sphere is predicated on the dominance of the liberal bourgeoisie. But the expansion of the public sphere beyond the boundaries of that group in the nineteenth century (Habermas cites the rise of the Chartist movement as an instance) undercuts the critical-rational debate that Habermas takes

as the key feature of the bourgeois public sphere. He argues that with the

diffusion of press and propaganda, the public body expands beyond the bounds of the bourgeoisie . . . [consequently] losing the coherence created by bourgeois institutions and a relatively high standard of education.⁶²

In addition, Habermas suggests that the development of the mass commercial press in the nineteenth century constituted the 'transformation of the journalism of conviction to one of commerce', with a resulting decline in debate.⁶³

The relevance of Habermas's concept of the public sphere to the analysis of Orwell's polemical essays lies in the construction of a model which places the periodical, and consequently the periodical essay, within a broad context of public debate. The model is problematic, especially in its elitist restriction of critical-rational debate to a certain class. The restrictions Habermas sets nevertheless signal the fact that, while critical-rational debate *per se* is not the preserve of the bourgeoisie, this class monopolised the periodicals and magazines in which such debate took place. Much the same is true in this century; a relatively small social and intellectual elite hold a disproportionate measure of control.

Terry Eagleton employs a modified version of the public sphere in *The Function of Criticism*, his survey of the role of criticism in British public debate.⁶⁴ Drawing upon the ideas of Habermas, Eagleton argues that while *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were organs of social, moral and political criticism, the main impulse of the bourgeoisie in the period was 'one of class consolidation'. This consolidation marks for Eagleton the highpoint of the classic bourgeois public sphere, wherein

the ferocious contention of essayists and pamphleteers took place in the gradual crystallisation of an increasingly self-confident ruling bloc in England, which defined the limits of the acceptably sayable.⁶⁵

Though Eagleton emphasises the self-legitimising limits of bourgeois 'rationality', he recognises that with the development of a situation allowing the formulating of broad public opinion, '[d]iscourse becomes a political force'.⁶⁶

The Periodical in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century: An Overview

While the insights of both Habermas and Eagleton are useful in considering the broadening of the environment for public debate through such media as the periodical, this expansion nevertheless developed within certain boundaries. Habermas's recognition that the mass of the population lacked cultural buying power is illustrated by the fact that the circulations of even the most popular periodicals of the eighteenth century were relatively small: *The Tatler* had a circulation of 'about three thousand'⁶⁷, Johnson's *The Rambler* only 500.⁶⁸

Raw circulation figures understate the numbers who read the various periodicals, for they were often available for general consumption in the rapidly swelling number of coffee houses. They might also be read aloud to illiterate groups. Nevertheless, readership centred on major cities where the vast majority of periodicals were produced (London and Edinburgh being key examples) or on those cities which contained a sufficiently large audience to warrant transportation of copies. There was also a gender bias to readerships: while coffee houses afforded the opportunity of a mixing of certain classes, they were male preserves.⁶⁹ Add to this their cost, and the audience for periodicals in the eighteenth century was limited by geography, class and gender.⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, certain limitations prevail through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Literacy rates rose, though Richard Altick maintains a necessary scepticism to both the accuracy of the statistics publicised in the last century, and the definition of literacy employed.⁷¹ The reading aloud of periodicals did alleviate the constraints of illiteracy for the nineteenth century reader to some degree, and the expansion of libraries and subscription reading rooms made literature, including periodicals, more accessible.

While the periodical form as a whole flourished, however, many of the major organs still catered for an economic elite. As Altick notes, the six shilling price of both the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews, as well as the respective costs of others such as *Blackwood's*

placed them out of the reach of most buyers; they were publications distinctly intended for the drawing room . . . and for the subscription reading-rooms whose very existence was evidence that many of the readers on the cultural level to which these periodicals appealed could not afford to buy them outright.⁷²

A high price was still being charged for 'participation in the market of cultural goods'.

A fundamental distinction must be made between periodicals involved in forms of critical-rational debate approximating Habermas's public sphere and what can loosely be termed 'entertainments'. For while the nineteenth century witnessed an enormous growth of periodical literature, much of this (especially that affordable to the mass public) was made up of religious and temperance tracts, sensationalist journals and 'family' periodicals. Nevertheless, these remained enormously popular.

In contrast, the circulations of lauded quarterlies and periodicals were small. Walter Houghton, for one, laments the 'unexpectedly small' circulation figures of the quality periodicals in 1860:

The Edinburgh Review 7,000; the *Quarterly Review* 8,000; the *Westminster* 4,000; the *North British* 2,000; *Blackwood's Magazine* 10,000; *Fraser's* 8,000; and Bagehot's *National Review* 1,000.⁷³

By way of comparison, Charles Dickens's weekly, *All The Year Round* began in 1859 with a circulation of 120,000.⁷⁴ Though Houghton acknowledges the difference between circulation and readership, his figures underline the limits of what Habermas would consider the organs of the liberal bourgeoisie.

Habermas may be correct in noting the decline of the classical bourgeois public sphere, yet one counter-argument to his critique is the continued polemicism of the periodical well beyond the eighteenth century. Indeed a resilient characteristic of the nineteenth-century periodical was partisanship. The two great journals of the century, *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Quarterly Review*, explicitly were party oriented, the latter being established primarily to counter the perceived Whiggish bias of the former. Other important periodicals were also established for partisan reasons: *Blackwood's Magazine* offered Tories disenchanted with *The Quarterly* a voice against *The Edinburgh Review*, while *The Westminster Review* acted as mouthpiece for the radical views of the Benthamites. Walker ruefully notes that in the early 1800s 'no periodical could long survive . . . unless it was linked with a political party'.⁷⁵ He sees the decline of papers like *The London Magazine*, which published writers of the calibre of Lamb, Carlyle and Hazlitt, as the direct result of a failure to capture and retain sufficient support from a specific political group.

Eagleton places this sectarianism in broad context; for him it signals

fundamental social and political upheaval in Britain. The period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Eagleton argues, sees the formation of what he terms a 'counter-public sphere': 'a whole oppositional network of journals, clubs, pamphlets, debates and institutions [invading] the dominant consensus'.⁷⁶ The periodical press plays a key role in the drama occurring in the public sphere, an arena which is 'much less of a bland consensus than of ferocious contention'.⁷⁷ By the mid-nineteenth century the potentially explosive nature of these political and intellectual upheavals threatened the dominant political order.

Walter Houghton argues along lines similar to Eagleton, seeing the rapid growth and publication of knowledge as generating discussion and enquiry in a public increasingly literate and articulate. Discussion also created uncertainty, for 'to question in an age when traditional thought was being challenged by new ideas and traditional institutions transformed, was to threaten the very convictions and social foundations on which life itself had been built'.⁷⁸

One important critic of the resilient sectarianism of the nineteenth century periodical was Matthew Arnold. In his seminal essay 'The Function of Criticism', published in 1865, he lays down 'disinterestedness' as the proper stance for criticism. Arnold deplores the 'present bane of criticism . . . [that the] organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve'.⁷⁹ Yet despite Arnold's argument, Houghton considers that from the 1860s the chief trend in periodicals was that towards impartiality.

For Eagleton, one signal of this trend is the development of so-called 'higher journalism', exemplified by the university journal. Bearing the imprint of Arnold's call for impartiality, the university journal, Eagleton argues, provides a means of 'pulling some periodical journalism into the orbit of an aloof, socially alienated academia [representing] another stage in the dissolution of the public sphere'.⁸⁰ More ominous, and certainly more effective in the wider sense, Eagleton argues, was the monopolization of Victorian literary production by men such as Charles Mudie and W.H. Smith. Their control, emanating from the ownership of the major circulating libraries, contends Eagleton, determined 'both the form and character of what was actually written . . . In the face of such massively concentrated economic and cultural power, no classical public sphere was remotely conceivable'.⁸¹

Eagleton clearly intends to lob a metaphorical hand-grenade into what he considers a complacent ivory tower. Yet his reduction of the potential

public sphere to the periodical medium, plus what might be available in circulating libraries, neglects the press as a whole. Habermas considers the press 'the public sphere's preeminent institution', clearly intending it to mean more than periodicals.⁸² The press in nineteenth-century Britain certainly takes on many of the functions formerly the domain of periodicals. This does not mean, however, that the periodical medium disappears. The impact of mass-circulation newspapers cannot be ignored; what is important is that the periodical medium's relationship to the newspaper be understood.

Stephen Koss argues in the Prologue to Volume One of his massive study, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, that the repeal by 1855 of a number of taxes and duties on advertisements and paper slashed the price of daily newspapers, thereby creating

a new forum for national debate by according newspapers a vastly enlarged readership and, consequently, an enhanced potential for political influenceSystematically and, for the most part, unabashedly, newspapers were used on an unprecedented scale to formulate party programmes, to implement political strategies, and to serve personal ambitions.⁸³

Koss's discernment of 'a new forum for national debate' suggests Habermas's bourgeois public sphere. The rest of his argument, however, establishes that powerful sectional interests, rather than critical-rational debate, determined the agenda for that debate.

Using his own perspective of the public sphere, Habermas charts what he sees as a decline in the press's function as a vehicle of critical-rational debate to one in which, increasingly in the nineteenth century, commercial considerations predominate. He argues that

with the establishment of the bourgeois constitutional state and the legalization of a political public sphere [roughly speaking, parliaments] the press as a forum of rational-critical debate is released from the pressure to take sides ideologically; now it could abandon its polemical stance and concentrate on the profit opportunities for a commercial business.⁸⁴

Habermas does not mean by this that the press withdraws completely from political discussion. Like Koss, he recognises in the first half of the nineteenth century 'the beginnings of a party-bound press controlled by

political organizations'.⁸⁵ Rather than acting as a forum for debate over the control of authority, as Habermas believes occurred in the early eighteenth century through independent periodicals, the increasing concentration and centralisation of the press, begun in the nineteenth century and consolidated in the twentieth, signals the shrinking of the public sphere as an arena for critical-rational debate.

Even so, periodicals continued to take oppositional stances on political and social issues, often operating as platforms for reform movements and pressure groups. Brian Harrison cites journals advocating (amongst others) Chartism, the abolition of slavery, temperance, an end to vivisection, and women's suffrage.⁸⁶ The suffragists, especially, realised the utility of the periodical, and were prolific in their output, the diversity of positions being articulated in a variety of journals. Harrison considers that 'the Edwardian abundance of women's suffrage periodicals reflects the rapid growth of the movement at that time'.⁸⁷ This activism justifies Eagleton's depiction of a 'counter-public sphere', although clearly groups advocating temperance barely qualify as challengers of the public order.

The ranks of periodicals were extended in the late nineteenth century with the development of the 'little magazine'. The form spurned the political in favour of the aesthetic, incorporating both a

rebellion against the traditional modes of expression and the wish to experiment with novel (and sometimes unintelligible) forms; and a desire to overcome the commercial or material difficulties which are caused by the introduction of any writing whose merits have not been proved.⁸⁸

Periodicals in the Twentieth Century

This leaning toward the aesthetic did not preclude little magazines from advocacy. Christopher Kent notes that, as their numbers increased in the twentieth century, some became

manifestoes for literary and artistic movements, often urgently proclaiming the advent of one ism or another – futurism, imagism, vorticism, cubism: modernism, in short.⁸⁹

Kent considers the increasing stridency and dogmatism of the little magazine in the early years of this century as paralleling 'a wider trend

in English public life as home rulers, feminists, Tories, and Laborites [sic] all adopted a more militant and confrontationalist style'.⁹⁰ *Blast*, Wyndham Lewis's rhetorical spit in the eye, can be taken as a model for such confrontationalism.

More overtly political were such critical weekly and monthly journals as *The New Statesman*, *New Age*, *Nation*, and *Time and Tide*, begun in the first decades of the twentieth century. *The New Statesman*, first published in 1913, primarily functioned as a transmitter for the prototype left-wing think tank, the Fabian Society. In 1931 it amalgamated with *The Nation*, and the announcement of the banns in *The New Statesman* gives an indication of each journal's self-perception. *The New Statesman* describes itself as not being

the property of any party, nor the slave of any dogma . . . [having] advocated political, social and industrial reforms on the lines of constructive Socialism. *The Nation*, on its side, has had a distinguished history, and has won and maintained a wide reputation for its vigorous Radicalism. The union of these two forces will result in . . . an independent journal of the Left.⁹¹

Other periodicals privileged literature over politics. *The Adelphi*, for example, was established in 1923 by John Middleton Murry as a transmitter for the idiosyncratic views of Murry and his friend and hero, D.H. Lawrence. The periodical underwent several changes of format in the twenties and a change of editor in 1930; Murry relinquished the post to Max Plowman. The first number under the new editor stressed continuity, and contained a statement of principle declaring that

the first principle we desire to see governing the contents of this magazine [sic] is the apparently very simple one summed up in the phrase 'a sense of reality'. To feel deeply and to mean sincerely may not be enough to save a man from sententiousness and sentimentality; but without the desire and the will to face life in such a spirit the journey towards individual truth and understanding cannot even be begun.⁹²

Within two years of this piece of navel gazing, however, *The Adelphi* had nailed its colours firmly to the mast of Socialism. Marx and Engels made guest appearances within the pages of the born-again periodical, which eventually allied itself to the small, radical I.L.P. To a great extent



these changes were the result of Murry's magpie-like tendency to pick up shiny philosophies. Yet the same quality meant that the same ideas fell easily from his beak. By the time George Orwell joined the I.L.P. in 1938, the periodical and the party had taken separate paths: the I.L.P. towards revolutionary Socialism, *The Adelphi* towards pacifism.

The example of *The Adelphi* is instructive, for it registers the fact that periodicals were forced by the convulsions of the thirties and forties to reassess their positions. *Time and Tide*, begun in 1920 as a focus for feminist writing and thought, took on a broader political stance as international affairs began to monopolise attention in the late 1930s. *The Left Review*, begun with revolutionary vigour in 1934, withdrew from the field of battle in 1938, defiant but defeated. The sparks of revolution detected in those optimistic days failed to find the necessary political or literary tinder. At any rate, a greater conflagration loomed.

The relationship of periodicals to actual political parties was slight in most cases. *The Adelphi's* flirtation with the I.L.P. lasted only a few years, while *Time and Tide* explicitly labelled itself 'An Independent Non-Party Weekly Review'. *The New Statesman and Nation's* sense of itself as independent has been cited. Set up by A.R. Orage in 1931, *The New English Weekly* was meant to advocate the economic theory of Social Credit. Yet, while the idea was fashionable for a time on the political fringes, the periodical itself catered to a larger, less doctrinaire audience.⁹³ Even the *Left Review*, for all its political fervour, did not publicly align itself with a particular party. Which is not to say that a reader with a smidgin of sense could not detect certain biases.

Though periodicals did not necessarily sign up with parties, the parties themselves, especially the more politically marginal, realised the propaganda value of a regular newspaper. The Communist Party of Great Britain's *Daily Worker*, begun in 1930, preached an unerring sermon in which, repeatedly, the end of capitalism was nigh. In contrast, while writers in the I.L.P. *New Leader* also detected portents of apocalypse, they denied Moscow as the site of the Celestial City.

Other periodicals attempted to fly the political nets. Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* (launched in 1933), John Lehmann's *New Writing* (1936) and Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940) all explicitly dissociated themselves from political allegiances; initially, at least. *New Writing* provides a poignant illustration of the difficulties in separating literature from politics. The 'Manifesto' in the first number announces that the periodical 'is first and foremost interested in literature'. It continues more ambiguously that 'though it does not intend to open its pages to writers of reactionary

or Fascist sentiments, it is independent of any political party'.⁹⁴ The third number, however, was dedicated to the memory of one of the periodical's contributors, Ralph Fox, who had been killed fighting in Spain.⁹⁵

Orwell had dealings with most of the periodicals cited in the foregoing list, though in the case of the *Left Review* and the *Daily Worker* he wrote against them rather than for them. He did both with regard to the *New Statesman and Nation*. Several points, central to this thesis, stem from the recognition of Orwell's interaction with periodicals. Most obviously, they provided him with an outlet for his essays, and brought him the small rewards of the reviewer. More importantly, however, in most cases Orwell wrote essays with the periodical format in mind. He wrote for specific periodicals, knowing the literary or political biases of his audience. In some cases, as in 'Shooting an Elephant' and 'Why I Write', essays were only written at the direct request of specific periodical editors. The periodical form is integral to many of Orwell's essays.

In addition, the fact that Orwell was able to write for a variety of journals registers the extent to which individual periodicals formed a loose and sometimes mutually antagonistic subset of the larger public sphere. Advertisements for the *New Statesman and Nation* could be found in *The Adelphi*, and vice versa. By contrast, the *New Leader* and the *Daily Worker* spent several years in the middle of the 1930s in bitter ideological struggle. The situation was anything but static: as certain periodicals succumbed to the laws of finance or fashion, others rose to take their place. Alliances and antagonisms between periodicals and their supporters changed with the circumstances. Between 1931 and 1941, circumstances did little else.

Orwell's utilisation of periodicals, and the interaction between periodicals, provide much of the focus for this thesis. Yet the danger exists that, in the process of focussing, proper perspectives are lost. To the modern reader, the fact that an essay by a luminary such as George Orwell appeared in an obscure 1930s periodical might seem odd; certainly, such a reader might expect that the periodical involved must have been ecstatic to receive such beneficence. Yet the reverse is closer to the truth, especially in the early part of the 1930s when Orwell was the obscure factor in the equation. For much of the period covered in this thesis, Orwell was an irritant without influence.

On a larger scale, the same problem of exaggerating occurs in relation to the periodicals in which Orwell appeared, or which he attacked. One modern critic, Muriel Mellown, for instance claims that

the decade of the thirties produced arguably the most valuable magazines of the century, all of them betokening in some way the drift to the political left.⁹⁶

This statement appears momentous until put into perspective by the cold water of circulation figures. Most of the periodicals for which Orwell wrote in the 1930s at best had circulations well under 10,000 copies, no matter how they might try to puff themselves.⁹⁷ By way of comparison, in 1938 the daily circulation for *The Times* stood at 192,000, while the largest daily circulation (that of the *Daily Express*) stood at 2,329,000.⁹⁸

The same caution is necessary even with journals as lauded as *The New Statesman and Nation*. Another modern critic, Edward Hyams rashly suggests that, had *The New Statesman and Nation* not existed, 'public opinion on such . . . momentous issues as anti-fascism in the Thirties . . . [would] have been very different from what it was'.⁹⁹ Such hyperbole needs to be placed next to the fact that, while *The Times* sold to hundreds of thousands and the *Daily Express* to millions of readers per day, *The New Statesman and Nation* boasted a weekly circulation of less than 25,000.¹⁰⁰ The *Daily Worker* sold more copies.¹⁰¹ Hyams further considers that the journal 'can be seen as the very symbol of the Thirties'.¹⁰² By some on the Left perhaps, but certainly not by all. A study of the impact and importance of periodicals in the 1930s and early 1940s is ill-served by wishful thinking.

Whatever the true extent of its impact, *The New Statesman and Nation* did survive, something that could not be said for all the periodicals inhabiting the territory Orwell ranged over. The detailed reasons for the demise of individual periodicals will be dealt with in specific chapters, but a few preliminary markers can be set down: the relatively small audience for the variety of ideas and stances on offer; in some cases, the inability to pay the authors of a quality sufficient to attract readers; the fluctuating enthusiasm of editors and staff; distribution problems; the lack of advertising revenue for most of the smaller journals, with the consequent need to rely on subscriptions to offset all costs.

It does not take much reading between the lines to see money at the root of many of these evils. Many periodicals ran permanent appeals to readers for financial assistance, often of the most urgent kind. The independent marginal socialist monthly, *Controversy*, which Orwell supported and wrote for provides a ready example. The second anniversary issue, published in October, 1938, contains the explicit warning that

unless we can *immediately* raise a considerable proportion of the [£150] we owe, there will be NO NOVEMBER ISSUE Catastrophe is imminent. Unless many readers value *Controversy* sufficiently to share the burden by responding to this appeal, the magazine must disappear. This is not a false alarm. We are not exaggerating.¹⁰³

The cavalry arrived in the nick of time. *Controversy* continued to enjoy a precarious existence over the next few years, changes of format (as well as name) indicative of the periodical's instinct for survival.

Survival took on a more intense aspect with the coming of the Second World War. The irony was that London, the home of many of the periodicals, was the natural target of German bombing. The precarious state of periodical production brought about by the war can be gauged from John Lehmann's thankful recognition in *Folios of New Writing* that because of the readers 'encouraging response, we have been able to carry on . . . in spite of bombs, burst windows and collapsing ceilings which surrounded us at one time'.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, of course, many of the those who had been writers in the 1930s were soldiers in the war. Certainly, these factors affected the debates that went on in the periodicals which did continue. Yet, ironically, the war had the effect of triggering new and equally contentious topics for writers to consider.

While the vigour and resilience of such periodicals does not of itself translate into wide-ranging influence, the importance of the periodical as a medium for debate should not be undervalued. Left-wing periodicals, magazines and newspapers attracted a politically active and often literate section of the public. In national terms, their overall numbers were small, and debates were for the most part circumscribed by the left-wing interests; this is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, the survey of periodicals already carried out suggests a thriving forum for political and literary debate, well-attuned to Orwell's combative stance and style.

The large amount of territory covered in this chapter requires summarising before more specific exploration can begin. An analysis of the essay has highlighted the inherent critical potential of the form, while its placement within the periodical has suggested a social dimension for the essay. This rough framework has been reinforced by the ideas of Habermas: that debate itself can be usefully considered through the broader historical context of a public sphere. It has been acknowledged that the situation obtaining to the thirties does

not approximate Habermas's ideal of open critical-rational debate. An awareness of the distance between the ideal and reality, however, allows the possibility of understanding that reality better. Orwell's periodical essays thus can be considered within the context of the broad social setting in which they first appeared. Ironically, the first essay to be considered in the next chapter on imperialism ('A Hanging') places notions of context firmly in the foreground.

Footnotes

- 1 Hugh Walker, *The English Essay and Essayists* (London, 1915), p. 2.
- 2 Cited in Richmond Bond, *The Tatler: The Making of a Literary Journal* (Massachusetts, 1971), p. 2.
- 3 Kingsley Martin, *Editor: a second volume of autobiography 1931-45* (London, 1968), p. 12.
- 4 See John Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St. George' Orwell* (Oxford, 1989). Rodden classifies 'portraits' of Orwell as Rebel, Common Man, Prophet, and Saint.
- 5 *Johnson's Dictionary: A Modern Selection*, edited by E.L. McAdam and George Milne (London, 1963), p. 167.
- 6 J.A.Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London, 1976), 244-7 (p. 244).
- 7 Marie Hamilton Law, *The English Familiar Essay in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1934), p. 7.
- 8 Bond, p. 127.
- 9 Law's study was reissued in 1965, indicating the continued interest in the essay while reinforcing the lack of more recent sustained studies.
- 10 Studies of both writers abound. For some of those which consider the essay in relation to Montaigne and Bacon see Richard Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London, 1972); John O'Neill, *Essaying Montaigne: A Study of the Renaissance Institution of Writing and Reading* (London, 1982); Stanley Fish, on Bacon, in *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (1972).
- 11 'The Lion and The Unicorn' (London, 1941). *CEJL II*, pp. 56-109; Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (London, 1984), p. 14; Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London, 1980) p. 468. In Crick, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' resides under the rubric 'Essays, articles and stories'. Clearly, it is not an example of the last two.
- 12 Georg Lukács, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay', in *Soul and Form* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974), pp. 1-18.
- 13 Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', *New German Critique*, No.32, Spring-Summer, 1984, 151-71 (p. 166).
- 14 'Charles Dickens', in *Inside The Whale & Other Essays* (London, 1940), pp. 9-85.

- 15 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989).
- 16 Jurgen Habermas, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)', *New German Critique*, No.3, Fall, 1974, pp. 49-55 (p. 52).
- 17 A.M.Boase, 'The Early History of the *Essai* Title in France and Britain', in *Studies in French Literature*, edited by J.C.Ireson, I.D.Macfarlane and Garnet Rees (Manchester, 1968), pp. 66-73 (p. 68). Boase, p. 69, reveals that Florio's 1603 translation of Montaigne into English bore the title *Essayes on Morall, Politike and Militarie Discourses*.
- 18 Walker, p. 38.
- 19 Boase, p. 71.
- 20 Boase, pp. 67-8. See also Walker, p. 2, and R.D.S.Jack, 'Poetry under King James VI' in *The History of Scottish Literature, Volume IV: Origins to 1660*, edited by R.D.S.Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), 125-139 (p. 125-8). I am indebted to Joyce Coleman for suggesting this last source. Pace Cuddon, Pope's verse essays connect with the very roots of the form.
- 21 Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, edited by John Pitcher (Middlesex, 1985), p. 293.
- 22 Walker, p. 3.
- 23 Walker, p. 3.
- 24 Walker, p. 15.
- 25 Walker, p. 18. Pitcher charts the development of the ten essays first published in 1597. A manuscript edition, prepared between 1607 and 1612 but never published, added twenty four pieces to the original number. This collection formed the basis of the second edition published in 1612, which included nine of the original ten essays, twenty three from the manuscript, and six new pieces. Pitcher, p. 46, notes that '[m]any of the 1597 and MS [sic] texts were altered and enlarged for this edition'. For the third edition, published in 1625, Bacon 'added twenty new essays, making a total of fifty-eight, and revised and expanded many of the existing ones'. A cursory glance at the 1597, 1612 and 1625 versions of an essay like 'Of Suitors' confirms the changes wrought by Bacon; pp. 242-55.
- 26 Walker, p. 18.
- 27 Fish, p. 81.
- 28 Fish, p. 87.
- 29 Sayce, p. 12.
- 30 Sayce, p. 9.
- 31 J.M. Robinson, introduction to *The Essays of Montaigne*, translated by E.J.Trechmann (London, 1927), ix-1, (p.xiv).
- 32 O'Neill, p. 9.
- 33 O'Neill, p. 20.
- 34 O'Neill, p. 9.
- 35 Lukács, pp. 1-2.
- 36 Lukács, p. 1.
- 37 Lukács, p. 9.
- 38 Lukács, p. 9.
- 39 Lukács, p. 17.
- 40 Lukács, p. 18.
- 41 Adorno, p. 157.

- 42 Adorno, p. 166.
- 43 The periodical essay is not defined in this thesis does solely as the single half-sheet essays exemplified in *The Tatler*. By this definition, the periodical essay remains purely an eighteenth century phenomenon.
- 44 Bond, p. 68.
- 45 Bond, p. 67.
- 46 Walker, p. 155.
- 47 John Calhoun Stephens, Introduction to *The Guardian*, edited by J.C. Stephens (Kentucky, 1982), p. 14.
- 48 Bond, p. 207.
- 49 Law, pp. 7-8.
- 50 Law, p. 8.
- 51 Law, pp. 8-9.
- 52 Law, p. 7.
- 53 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Middlesex, 1961), p. 85.
- 54 Walter E. Houghton, 'Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes', in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, edited by Joan Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester, 1982), 3-27 (p. 22).
- 55 Habermas, 'The Public Sphere', p. 49.
- 56 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 28.
- 57 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 32.
- 58 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 33.
- 59 Habermas, 'The Public Sphere', p. 52.
- 60 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 37.
- 61 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 38.
- 62 Habermas, 'The Public Sphere', p. 54.
- 63 Habermas, 'The Public Sphere', p. 53.
- 64 Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London, 1984).
- 65 Eagleton, p. 12.
- 66 Eagleton, p. 13.
- 67 Bond, p. 28.
- 68 Walker, p. 135.
- 69 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 33, mentions the 'vigorous but vain struggle' of London women against coffee houses, although the complaint was against the effects of coffee rather than access to periodicals. In contrast, the French *salons* were controlled largely by female patrons.
- 70 Walker, p. 129, reveals that the Stamp Act of 1712, which imposed a tax of 1/2p on every half-sheet, temporarily checked the proliferation of periodicals.
- 71 Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A social history of the mass reading public* (Chicago, 1963). While figures appear to show an increase in literacy amongst males from roughly 67 per cent in 1841 to over 97 per cent in 1900, Altick, p. 319, notes that 'reading' might mean simply the ability 'to stammer . . . through a few verses of scripture or a few questions and answers in the catechism', and that reading was so badly taught that it might be soon forgotten once the pupil left school. Altick, pp. 168-9.

also notes that literacy rates for females were lower than those for men in the middle of the century, although parity had almost been achieved by 1900.

- 72 Altick, p. 319.
- 73 Houghton, p. 7.
- 74 Walker, p. 228.
- 75 Altick, p. 395.
- 76 Eagleton, p. 36.
- 77 Eagleton, p. 37.
- 78 Houghton, p. 4.
- 79 Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *Essays in Criticism* (New York, 1924), p. 19.
- 80 Eagleton, p. 60.
- 81 Eagleton, p. 58.
- 82 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 181.
- 83 Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Volume One: The Nineteenth Century* (London, 1981), p. 1.
- 84 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 184.
- 85 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 186.
- 86 Brian Harrison, 'Press and pressure group in modern Britain', in *Victorian Periodical Press* edited by Shattock and Wolff, pp. 261-295.
- 87 Harrison, p. 278.
- 88 *The Little Magazine: A History And A Bibliography*, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich (New Jersey, 1947), pp. 4-5.
- 89 Christopher Kent, *Introduction to British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age 1837-1914* (Connecticut, 1984), xiii-xxvi (p.xxii).
- 90 Kent, p.xxii.
- 91 Notice of merger with *Nation*, *The New Statesman*, 21 February, 1931, p. 573.
- 92 Max Plowman, 'Notes and Comments', *The Adelphi*, (October 1931), 1-3 (p. 2).
- 93 Orwell, in a June 1933 letter to his friend Brenda Salkend noted: 'As a monetary scheme Social Credit is probably sound, but its promoters seem to think that they are going to take the main weapon out of the hands of the governing classes without a fight, which is an illusion'. *CEJL I*, pp. 120-1 (p. 121).
- 94 John Lehmann, 'Manifesto', *New Writing* (Spring 1936), p.v.
- 95 Notice of Ralph Fox's death, *New Writing*, (Spring 1937).
- 96 Muriel Mellown, *Introduction to British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age 1914-1984*, edited by Alvin Sullivan (Connecticut, 1986), xv-xxx (p.xx).
- 97 Circulation figures, when published within the periodicals themselves, were unscrutinised, and often used merely to generate interest in prospective readers. True circulation figures for all but a few periodicals are difficult to ascertain. *Will's*, the most authoritative guide to periodicals, did not collect figures until after the period covered in this thesis. The Audit Bureau of Circulation (hereafter A.B.C.), though begun in 1932, only gathered figures from periodicals which took out membership. Of those considered in this thesis, only *The New Statesman and Nation*, *The Listener* and

(rather curiously) the *Daily Worker* were members at any time before the end of 1941. Figures used in this thesis were gained on the enquiry of the author.

- 98 See *Political and Economic Planning Group Report on The British Press* (London, 1938), p. 114, p. 116, respectively.
- 99 Edward Hyams, *The New Statesman: The History of the First Fifty Years 1913-63* (London, 1963), p.x.
- 100 Average 1937 circulation figures (supplied by the A.B.C.) for *The New Statesman and Nation*: January-June 24,940; July-December 24,977.
- 101 William Rust estimates a figure of 'never . . . higher than 50,000 a day and 100,000 at weekends'. See William Rust, *The Story of the Daily Worker*, edited and completed by Allen Hutt (London, 1949), p. 42.
- 102 Hyams, p. 90
- 103 Plea for funds, *Controversy* (October 1938), pp. 250-1.
- 104 John Lehmann, 'Dear Reader', *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940), p. 5.

Evil Empires: Imperialism

I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better . . . I did not even know then that British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it.

George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', *New Writing* (1936).¹

[H]ow can we 'fight Fascism' except by bolstering up a far vaster injustice [the British Empire]?

For of course it is vaster. What we always forget is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa'.

George Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', *The Adelphi* (1939).²

The British Empire was peaceful as no other area of comparable size has ever been . . . [T]he British ruling class had their points. They were preferable to the truly modern men, the Nazis and the Fascists.

George Orwell, 'The Ruling Class', *Horizon* (1941).³

Modern commentators searching for clues to George Orwell's political development or psychological makeup sometimes turn, metaphorically speaking, to the East, to his writings on Burma. Orwell's time in the Indian Imperial Police mark him out from his literary contemporaries more readily than his periods of dossing, tramping and itinerant work in the late twenties and early thirties. These later activities certainly made Orwell unusual, especially for an old Etonian, but spells of poverty for writers are accepted as part of the initiation rite, like duelling scars for Junkers. While the freezing Embankment or the fetid kitchens of Parisian restaurants might be uncongenial, the Burma in which Orwell served suggests something exotic, and therefore potentially important.

In fact, the basic biographical details are well enough known to need only brief recounting.⁴ Born in India in 1903, the son of an imperial official, Orwell was educated in England, joined the Indian Imperial

Police in 1922, and for the next five years was stationed at various postings in Burma. In August, 1927, he left Burma on leave, but did not return, officially resigning from the Imperial Police early the next year. The country provides the setting for two of Orwell's earliest essays, 'A Hanging', published in *The Adelphi* in 1931, and for 'Shooting an Elephant', which appeared in John Lehmann's fledgling periodical, *New Writing*, in 1936.⁵ Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days*, a satirical probing of British imperial hypocrisy in Burma, was published in 1934. Additionally, Orwell refers to his Imperial Police experiences in overtly autobiographical passages of *The Road To Wigan Pier*, and such essays as 'Why I Join The I.L.P.', 'Democracy in The British Army' and 'Why I Write'.⁶

These writings on Burma and the rejection of a career as an imperial apparatchik buttress a view of Orwell as a staunch opponent of imperialism. In their biography of Orwell's early years, for example, Peter Stansky and William Abrahams claim that Orwell 'came back to England [in 1927] with a hatred of the Imperialism he had served . . . a position arrived at with difficulty and thereafter firmly held'.⁷ This observation approximates that of George Woodcock, who, in his sympathetic analysis of the writer, states that 'Orwell continued to view society according to the imperialist model he had observed in Burma . . . a world of master race and subject race'.⁸ For Raymond Williams, Burma also bulks large in his assessment of Orwell. Orwell's 'special advantage', argues Williams, came from his ability 'to look at England within a knowledge of its Empire'.⁹

Bernard Crick, however, locates the potential for anti-imperialism earlier, in Orwell's years at prep school. The repression encountered there, Crick suggests, prepared Orwell 'to reject imperialism when he went to Burma and to side with the underdog, for ever afterwards, with empathy and understanding'.¹⁰ By Crick's calendar the seeds of anti-imperialism were planted earlier, but all five commentators agree that Burma provided the proper conditions for germination. Significantly, all see Orwell retaining the lessons learned in Burma, providing him with an enduring means of conceptualising the world.

As the quotations at the head of the chapter make clear, however, Orwell's essays do not bear out the argument for a coherent, sustained antagonism to imperialism. In 'Shooting an Elephant', for example, he writes of imperialism as 'an evil thing', continuing that '[t]heoretically – and secretly of course – I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, The British'.¹¹ On their own, these sentiments

signify an unambiguous condemnation of imperialism. Yet within the same paragraph Orwell qualifies this position, asserting that the British Empire 'is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it'. All empires are evil, but it appears that some are more evil than others.

'Evil' suggests moral repugnance, something which infuses Orwell's earlier essay, 'A Hanging'. Yet, by the time of the provocatively titled 'Not Counting Niggers', published in *The Adelphi* in July 1939, Orwell has introduced an economic note into his attack British imperialism. In charging it as 'a far vaster injustice' than Fascist Germany, Orwell observes 'it is not in Hitler's power to make a penny an hour a normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India, and we are at pains to keep it so'.¹² The description of this pool of cheap labour as the 'overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat' registers a quasi-Marxist perspective, not surprising given Orwell's membership at the time of the Trotskyist I.L.P.

The polemical nature of the comparison made between the British Empire and Nazi Germany in 'Not Counting Niggers' can be gauged by the fact that the essay was published at the height of war speculation; within two months, the Second World War had broken out. Less than two years later, as the quotation from 'The Ruling Class' makes plain, the Empire Orwell had vilified as something worse than Hitler's Germany is portrayed retrospectively as 'peaceful as no other area of comparable size has ever been'. Perhaps the penny an hour had something to do with peace. Whatever the case, claims for consistency in Orwell's position on imperialism are difficult to sustain.

The charge that Orwell modified his position on imperialism during the thirties and into the forties hardly condemns him. Change can mark sophistication rather than compromise, and the development of a model of imperialism more complex than one of 'master race and subject race' would seem essential given the times. Certainly, the argument (which Orwell accepted in the late 1930s) that a major European war would be an imperialist struggle had a beguiling logic given the machinations and vacillations of the British government. The suspicion of duplicity choked the air. Yet, when war did come, simple survival temporarily diverted attention from the iniquities of British imperialism. Orwell was not alone in lending support to something he had once criticised bitterly.

Several general points need be made before beginning a detailed examination of the essays in which Orwell considered imperialism. The first

derives from the complexity of the term itself. Acknowledgement of the difficulties of adequate definition stretch back to the first systematic account of the phenomenon, J.A.Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study*, first published in 1902 and revised in 1938.¹³ Hobson identifies relatively pure forms of nationalism and colonialism: the former being 'the establishment of political union on a basis of nationality'¹⁴, the latter operating when 'colonists transplant the civilization they represent to the new natural and social environment in which they find themselves'.¹⁵ Distinct from either of these, modern imperialism comprises the occupation of territories by 'a small minority of white men, officials, traders and organisers, exercising political and economic sway over great hordes of population regarded as inferior and as incapable of exercising any considerable rights of self-government, in politics or industry'.¹⁶

This description captures the Burma Orwell experienced. Hobson acknowledges, however, that the boundaries between definitions sometimes blur, noting that

certain broad consistency in its relation to other kindred terms is the nearest approach to definition which such a term as Imperialism admits. Nationalism, internationalism, colonialism, its three closest congeners, are equally elusive, equally shifty, and the changeful overlapping of all four demands the closest vigilance of students of modern politics.¹⁷

Not all of Orwell's essays on imperialism exhibit such vigilance.

The examination of essays in which Orwell explored the topic of imperialism allows an analysis of his use of the eye-witness viewpoint. Given Orwell's posthumous reputation as a blunt teller of unvarnished truths, the temptation exists to accept that the 'I' of his essays must in all cases be Orwell himself. By a neat logic, because Orwell is reckoned honest, the eye-witness account above his signature must be both accurate and forthright. The analysis begun in this chapter, and continued in subsequent chapters, questions these naive assumptions. The eye-witness viewpoint is a rhetorical tool, not simply an innocent stance. Orwell frequently employs the viewpoint to lead readers down particular rhetorical paths.

Orwell's essays on imperialism exhibit a variety of approaches and assessments. At times his hostility is stark and compelling, yet he is also willing to exonerate imperialism (in its British form, at least). Despite a professed sympathy for the victims of imperialism, Orwell's essentially

Anglo-centric position creates curious tensions and contradictions. Importantly, too, while Orwell's time in Burma influences some of his ideas on imperialism, his essays both reflect and react to arguments occurring in Britain. Periodicals provided the forum for the presentation of his own views.

Out of Sight? Imperialism in the Early 1930s

Cliches carry some truth content, and at the beginning of the nineteen thirties the old saw that the sun never set on the British Empire could still be asserted with confidence. Britain, a nation of just 46,000,000 people, controlled dependencies in which ten times that number dwelt, within a combined area 130 times its own size. The Empire also underpinned the nation's economic wealth, providing over a third of imports while soaking up more than forty per cent of Britain's exports.¹⁸ Yet, apart from the complex problems involved in India's quest for independence, the problems of imperialism rarely rose to public notice.

J.A.Hobson's study of the subject remained the seminal work, its importance acknowledged by Lenin in his 1917 analysis.¹⁹ Lenin's tome in turn influenced the thinking of younger left-leaning intellectuals John Strachey and Ralph Fox in the 1930s.²⁰ In contrast to these economic studies, Leonard Woolf's *Imperialism and Civilisation*, published in 1928, had conceptualised imperialism as a clash of civilisations, from which the West had only temporarily emerged triumphant.²¹ The relative scarcity of large-scale studies of imperialism was mirrored in the lack of attention paid even by many politically aware periodicals. Some fringe newspapers, such as the *New Leader*, did devote space to the subject; that contribution will be examined later in the chapter.

Admittedly, the complexity of the questions (for example, Indian independence) hampered analysis. The confusion of positions, fears and expectations generated can be gauged by a preview of the Round Table Conference, held in London between November 12, 1930 and January 19, 1931 to discuss the independence situation. An article in *The New Statesman* (not yet merged with *The Nation*) stated

The Indians demand Dominion Status. That as an ultimate good is very well. But immediately – and for some time to come – it is

obviously impossible . . . But responsible government for India, on a stage that would make a transition stage towards Dominion Status, is not only possible at once, but desirable . . . And it is responsible government on that scale that the Simon constitution refuses.²²

The conference was a limited success, a *New Statesman* review considering that, while 'the Conference has not solved the problem of India . . . it has brought a solution very much nearer'. This optimism is tempered with caution, the conference being 'only the beginning of a new struggle, full of difficulties and dangers'.²³

The plight of India's workers also occasionally evoked sympathy and anger amongst members of the Left in Britain, as evidenced by H.N.Brailsford's condemnatory article 'The Future of the Indian Worker' in newly-renamed *New Statesman and Nation*.²⁴ Yet in the next twelve months only a handful of articles on India were to appear in that journal, an index of the fluctuating importance given in Britain to the problem of Indian independence. The titles of these articles alone indicate a gloomy reading of the situation: 'The Indian Tragedy' (November 1931); 'The Indian Impasse' (May 1932); and 'Going Backwards in India', in July of that year.²⁵ The struggle foretold in 1931 was not to end for sixteen years.

'A Hanging'

The problems posed by imperialism attracted little attention in *The Adelphi* when it published Eric A. Blair's essay, 'A Hanging', in August 1931. At that time *The Adelphi* offered small-l liberal politics flavoured with Christian musings, garnished with European cultural thought and fairly bland literature.²⁶ Blair had begun reviewing for what was then *The New Adelphi* in March 1930, though a letter to Max Plowman dated September, 1929, points to earlier attempts at association. The letter refers to 'an article describing a day in a casual ward' Blair had sent to Plowman, but from whom he had received no reply.²⁷

Though by October 1932 the periodical would have allied itself with the I.L.P., in 1931 the political and literary concerns of *The Adelphi* were secondary to questions of religion. The impetus for these questions was provided by Middleton Murry's seven 'Essays on Modern Religion', a

series ended in May 1931. These essays sparked fervent debate between contributors, amongst them *Adelphi* co-editors Richard Rees and Max Plowman: what religious position, if any, did *The Adelphi* espouse? The specific viewpoints are less important than the fact that questions of religious faith, rather than political issues, predominated at the time 'A Hanging' was published. Read as a moral attack upon capital punishment, then, the essay fitted inconspicuously into *The Adelphi* of August 1931.

As a preliminary to analysing 'A Hanging', it must first be recognised as a discrete piece. While this might seem obvious, it runs against the flow of criticism which sees Orwell's work in holistic terms, as a tightly interwoven pattern. Exemplary in this regard is George Woodcock, who writes that

the incident described in 'A Hanging' . . . was one of the crucial events in Orwell's Burmese days. 'I watched a man hang once,' he wrote elsewhere, 'It seemed to me worse than a thousand murders.'²⁸

Woodcock takes his quotation from Part II of *The Road To Wigan Pier*, a section explicitly labelled as autobiography by Orwell. Woodcock embroiders the pattern by inserting the title of Orwell's *Burmese Days* as though it were merely descriptive of a time period. Just as importantly, he illegitimately conflates the statement that an event occurred with an essay bearing the same title.

'A Hanging' can be read as a simple morality tale, in which a British imperial functionary in Burma comes to realise the 'unspeakable wrongness' of capital punishment. At the hanging of a Hindu prisoner for an unspecified crime, the narrator observes the condemned man avoiding a puddle on his path to the gallows. The prisoner's unconscious signal of his underlying humanity triggers a revelation in the narrator's mind, for 'till that moment I had never realised what it is to destroy a healthy, conscious life'.²⁹ Despite this individual illumination, however, the execution takes place. In the aftermath, the narrator's own perceptions are drowned in guilty social ritual: 'We all drank together, native and European alike, quite amicably. The dead man was a hundred yards away'.³⁰

For many critics, the prisoner's dodging of the puddle, and the narrator's consequent flash of awareness represent the pivotal moments of the essay. Certainly the pathos generated by the prisoner's action gives

the essay much of its emotional potency. Surprisingly, however, given the narrator's role as both eye-witness and (apparently) sole perceiver of the moral implications of the hanging, he is delineated only sketchily. Instead, he is subsumed repeatedly in a number of groups.

Initially, the narrator merely is one of the imperial officials and local operatives overseeing the execution. The first reference to him as an individual is oblique – a dog bounds into the gallows procession, races up to the condemned man, and licks that man playfully. After being caught, the dog is restrained by having the narrator's handkerchief linked through its collar. Soon after, the narrator experiences his epiphany at the puddle, the revelation causing him to consider the implications of the hanging. Yet he does so within the context of a larger group. The prisoner, until now segregated from those carrying out his execution, is included by the narrator: 'he and we were a party of men together . . . and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone – one mind less, one world less'.³¹

Any sense of communality, however, quickly dies. Once on the scaffold, the prisoner's rhythmic chant (as he steels himself for execution) elicits the confession from the narrator that 'the same thought was in all our minds: oh, kill him quickly, get it over, stop that abominable noise'.³² Briefly included in a broad humanity, the prisoner is summarily dispatched by the narrator, himself one of the tortured souls forced to endure the condemned man's cries. The execution is carried out.

Momentarily, and obliquely again, the narrator is individualised. In the immediate aftermath of the hanging, he notes that 'the prisoner had vanished, and the rope was twisting on itself. I let go of the dog'.³³ Yet the narrator views the corpse as part of the imperial administration, adopting an institutional aloofness to the body so recently a sentient being. As they leave the gallows yard, a crude joke relaxes pent-up tension, and again the narrator flashes into view: 'I found that I was laughing quite loudly. Everyone was laughing'.³⁴ Once again, momentary individualisation is overridden by subsumption in a group.

The narrator's lack of self-definition, his constant and changing inclusion within a variety of groups (British imperial officials, all men, those guiltily socialising after the execution) might be taken to suggest a common humanity, and therefore to reinforce the immorality of extinguishing a life. Yet, importantly, the narrator himself defines each group, designating members and non-members. The most obvious instances concern the prisoner, whose relation to the social world is dictated by the narrator's perceptions.

Even in the moment he appears to be included most fully, one of 'a party of men together', the prisoner's exclusion is signalled, for 'in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone'. The narrator has, in a sense, already rationalised the condemned man out of existence. The subsequent passionless description of the corpse makes sense in these terms. The man who so recently was another mind, another world, has, in the narrator's words, been rendered 'dead as a stone'.³⁵ The brutal, dehumanising impact of the simile reinforces the extent to which the sensibilities of the narrator control the portrayal of characters and events. He functions as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, and therefore of legitimacy.

The narrator's control can also be detected in the depiction of minor characters. The formality of the other British character, the superintendent of the jail, is leavened by a show of decency, albeit macabre: he allows the condemned man time to chant upon the scaffold. Local characters are also delineated, but repeatedly in negative terms: the prisoner is puny and sports 'the moustache of a comic man on the films'; the head jailer, 'a fat Dravidian', is both garrulous and sycophantic; the hangman has a 'servile crouch'; a Eurasian jailer displays insensitivity to the horrible act taking place. The reactions of the local characters are depicted as less humane than those of their imperial masters.

As both a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, and as the apparent vehicle for the moral argument of the tale, the narrator tends to validate the group of which he is most clearly a member, the imperial British. At the same time, his very lack of substantiality obscures his position within an imperial administration empowered with the authority to extinguish human life. Instead of being recognised as the outcome of imperial domination, the 'unspeakable wrongness of cutting short a life' is considered solely in universal terms. No critique of the power structure involved takes place in 'A Hanging'. The narrator functions to deflect attention from – rather than to focus attention upon – the imperial processes at work.

Ironically, despite his pivotal importance in structuring and interpreting events in 'A Hanging', the narrator largely proves inadequate as an eye-witness. For, if the immorality of taking life is central to the moral and emotional thrust of the narrative, it is the one thing the narrator does not witness. The grisly moment of execution seems a magician's trick; the prisoner simply vanishes. The institutionalised coldness with which the narrator observes the dead man further neutralises the horror of the situation. Yet one character in 'A Hanging' does witness a man

dying: immediately the prisoner 'disappears' the dog (let go of by the narrator) runs to the back of the gallows, where it 'stopped short, barked, and then retreated into a corner of the yard, where it stood among the reeds, looking timorously out at us'.³⁶

There are, in fact, two eye-witnesses in 'A Hanging'. The linking of narrator and dog by means of the handkerchief is not accidental; indeed, once recognised, the symbolism seems clumsy. Too often, the importance of the dog is overlooked in readings of the essay. One who does highlight the importance of the dog is George Woodcock. Woodcock takes the dog's actions as signifying 'almost as if the world of nature had broken in an condemned the unnatural proceedings of men'.³⁷ This is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far.

Woodcock fails to recognise that the animal functions strategically within the narrative. The dog's intrusion into the procession to the gallows marks the first disruption of the seemingly inevitable progress towards the scaffold. The dog's antics mock the sinister pomp of the humans; their attempts to capture it deteriorate into slapstick. The animal's ready acceptance of the inherent humanity of the condemned prisoner also pre-figures the narrator's illumination of the worth of life. Crucially, the dog's 'humane' reaction to the execution starkly contrasts with the brutish indifference of the other characters. Its pedigree, 'half Airedale, half pariah', incorporating both coloniser and colonised, suggests a symbolic importance rarely appreciated in the essay.

Recognising the significance of the dog necessarily undercuts those readings of 'A Hanging' founded upon a conception of it purely as a first-hand account. The narrator and the dog both provide evidence, which together amounts to more than the sum of the parts. Both are crucial to the construction of the narrative. Understanding the shortcomings of the narrator as an eye-witness foregrounds complexities often ignored in those analyses which innocently accept the work as Orwell's account of his experience. The spectre of Orwell need not be invoked to interpret 'A Hanging'.

Uncoupled from Orwell's life, the essay cannot draw strength from the supposedly steadfast anti-imperialist stance of its author. This raises the question of whether an anti-imperialist argument is put forward in 'A Hanging'. As Christopher Hollis acknowledges:

in a way the story has nothing particular to do with the imperial system, for, though the hanging happened to take place in Burma,

it might in all the essentials of the story just as well have taken place anywhere else.³⁸

Hollis correctly senses that the narrative might have happened somewhere other than Burma. In fact, however, they do take place in a defined social, racial and political setting.

The reduction of Burma to the status of exotic setting serves to signal the narrator's control of perceptions. Ultimately, 'A Hanging' does not highlight the imperial system, nor particularly the death of a delineated individual; rather, it validates the sensibilities of the narrator – a British imperial functionary. By creating empathy with a perceptive, sensitive yet humanly flawed narrator 'A Hanging' draws attention to the 'white man's burden' of imperial rule. In doing so it goes some way towards exonerating that rule.

Burmese Days: An Aside

Orwell was not to consider the question of imperialism in an essay for almost five years after the publication of 'A Hanging'. In *Burmese Days*, published in 1934, he probes the fears, racism, pretensions and dissimulation of a group of imperial officials and traders in a remote Burmese town. The book was received well generally: Cyril Connolly writing in *The New Statesman and Nation* recognised shortcomings, but still considered it 'an admirable novel'. He perceived that the book concentrated on the experiences of the British rather than the Burmese, acknowledging that it deals with 'the purely civilian population of a small town . . . with a few businessmen running an unbusinesslike people'.³⁹ Connolly apparently finds nothing wrong with this state of affairs, and *Burmese Days* was listed as one of 'The Best Books of 1935' in *The New Statesman and Nation*.⁴⁰ Then again, so was Enid Bagnold's *National Velvet*.

While Connolly rightly recognises an economic aspect in *Burmese Days*, what power the novel possesses derives from the investigation of moral failings. Indeed, there is something tamely formulaic about the plot, as though it could be set down as a recipe: mix a selection of British colonials (cooked and raw) and several exotic Burmese; add some spice, a little hot sauce; douse in Monsoon rain, then bring to the boil under the relentless tropical sun. Then, stand well clear. What

interest the characters generate derive from the extent to which they are insincere, vicious, egocentric, pompous, weak, or combinations of the above.

Striking at the Empire

The moral analysis of imperialism Orwell carries out in fiction can be contrasted fruitfully with those non-fiction accounts which focussed on the economic foundations of imperialism. John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle For Power*, published in 1932, drew heavily from Lenin's economic interpretation. Included in the section entitled 'The Future of Capitalism', Strachey's analysis locates imperialism within a context of monopoly capitalism and Fascism, the latter being a phenomenon Lenin had not foreseen.⁴¹

Similarly, Ralph Fox's *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism*, published in 1933, quotes at length from Lenin.⁴² Fox's specific subject allows him more scope for the analysis of imperialism, and he goes further than Strachey, arguing for an understanding of the relationship between British and Indian workers. Fox writes that

The whole character of our own labour movement has been determined by the exploitation of our colonial peoples, and the issue of the struggle of the British working class . . . cannot be considered apart from the national liberation of the peoples of the Empire.⁴³

An economic interpretation of imperialism could also be found in some periodicals. The *New Leader*, for example, regularly dealt with the topic, attacking the annual observance of Empire Day, decrying Labour Party policy, championing the causes of subject peoples, and repeatedly forecasting the end of imperialism. I.L.P. leader James Maxton's 1933 front page attack 'Our Cracking Empire: The Beginning of the End of Capitalist Imperialism' exemplifies the last type. Maxton professes not to 'envy those who, in a period of capitalist decline, are faced with the task of holding together an Empire developed on the basis of prosperous Capitalism'.⁴⁴

The *New Leader* also provided a vehicle for the colonized themselves, as with Jawaharlal Nehru's 'India's Struggle Against British Imperialism - Against Indian Capitalism' in March 1934. Nehru wonders:

Perhaps generations of imperialist domination have affected the ideology of British labour and made it unable to take a correct and objective view where British interests are concerned.⁴⁵

Not that the *New Leader* lacked critics within its own ranks. Reginald Reynolds, in 'This Empire of Ours' links the futures of British and Indian workers in a manner similar to Fox, arguing that

The cause of the Indian workers is our cause. Their failure means lower wages and more unemployment for workers in Lancashire. Their success means ultimately the success of Socialism, which can only be built upon racial equality and the breaking up of Empires.⁴⁶

In February 1935, India was described in the paper as 'Britain's Slave State'.⁴⁷

While continuing its reporting of the tortuous manoeuvrings over Indian independence, *The New Statesman and Nation* occasionally stepped back from the immediate situation to survey the broader territory. 'The Problem of Colonial Empire', which appeared in October 1935, considers the advantages of colonial empire (from the British position) in terms of prestige, military considerations and economics.⁴⁸ Links between the empire and the monopoly of raw materials are recognised, and it is argued that the liberating of colonial policy would reverse 'the disastrous trend of economic nationalism'. The article also emphasises the economic reality which undercuts British belief in the success of their empire, commenting that

this is sometimes put down to our superior virtue or to our sagacity in handling 'natives'; but it is in fact largely due to the superior capacity of the British money market.⁴⁹

The Left Review also weighed in against British imperialism from an economic angle, although it spits most of its venom in one attack, its September 1936 number. This contains stories by Indian writers, an attack on the effect of British imperialism on Indian Literature by Mulk Raj Anand, and Nehru's essay 'Campaign for Indian Liberties'.⁵⁰ The editorial intertwines the causes of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism, charging that 'the sincerity of our protests at fascist brutalities can

only be measured by the strength of our efforts to secure the right of the colonial peoples to govern themselves'.⁵¹

Beyond the moral and political needs for overthrowing imperialism, the editorial argues an economic case, so that

the notion that, because the exploitation of an empire once allowed the ruling class to maintain out of their super-profits a slightly higher standards for the workers here, therefore the freedom of the colonies spells ruin for our country is an illusion . . . A free India and Africa . . . would develop such a tremendous purchasing power that every mine, steel-plant, loom and factory . . . would be working full time to supply it.⁵²

The validity of this and other arguments is less important than the realisation that, in contrast to Orwell's essentially moral analysis, an economic understanding of imperialism was being propounded in left-leaning periodicals.

Death of the Imperialist Author: 'Rudyard Kipling'

The death of Rudyard Kipling in 1936 led to Orwell writing a short, appreciative essay for the *New English Weekly*. Beyond its brief to promote the ideas of Social Credit, the periodical analysed broad political, literary and artistic developments. Orwell (still Eric Blair) had begun reviewing for the *New English Weekly* in 1932. His positive November 1935 review of Henry Miller's controversial – and at the time banned – novel *Tropic of Cancer* marked the beginning of regular bi-monthly reviewing, halted by Orwell's departure for Spain in December 1936.⁵³

'Rudyard Kipling' is short, though interesting.⁵⁴ Orwell's assessment splits formally into three paragraphs: the first recognises Kipling's enormous popularity and impact, while the second questions the importance of Kipling's attitude to imperialism. The final paragraph, while recognising that in the world of the thirties Kipling had come to be seen as 'a kind of enemy, a man of perverted and alien genius', nevertheless ends almost plaintively, Orwell keening, 'now that he is dead, I for one cannot help wishing that I could offer some kind of tribute . . . to the storyteller who was so important to my childhood'.⁵⁵

The extraordinarily personal final note echoes one in the first section in which Orwell professes that 'I worshipped Kipling at thirteen, loathed him at seventeen, enjoyed him at twenty, despised him at twenty-five, and now again rather admire him'.⁵⁶ Kipling's importance, in whatever form, clearly seems to have survived Orwell's childhood. While the mature Orwell recognises in Kipling's writing 'the vulgarity of his prose style' and that Kipling's verse is 'almost a byword for badness', he nevertheless praises Kipling's 'supreme' construction and economy, and writes that even his bad verse stays with the reader – 'it needs a streak of genius even to become a byword'. To admire with reservations ultimately is still to admire. By recognising Kipling's faults while still acknowledging his genius, Orwell goes part way towards undercutting criticism of Kipling's work.

The second section considers a 'much more distasteful' aspect of the writer, 'the imperialism to which he chose to lend his genius'. The phrasing here is significant: Kipling is not excused – he is said to choose, after all – but it does make that choice provisional. Lending necessarily is a temporary transaction and it leaves Kipling's genius intact. Orwell goes on to defend partially Kipling's choice, arguing that '[t]he imperialism of the eighties and nineties was sentimental, ignorant and dangerous, but it was not entirely despicable'.⁵⁷ For whom, one must ask.

As with 'A Hanging' and *Burmese Days*, Orwell's is an Anglo-centric viewpoint, the concentration upon Empire and the situation of the imperial ruler, rather than imperialism proper and the position of the subject peoples. Orwell reinforces his defence of Kipling by continuing that

the picture then called up by the word 'empire' was a picture of over-worked officials and frontier skirmishes, not of Lord Beaverbrook and Australian butter. It was still possible to be an imperialist and a gentleman, and of Kipling's *personal* decency there can be no doubt.⁵⁸

At most times, Orwell employs the word 'decency' to suggest the moral qualities of the common English people. In this formulation the word 'decency' has more specific classed-based connotations; it implies that Kipling is a 'decent chap'. This is the language of the private club.

By way of comparison, parts of Rebecca West's appreciation of Kipling in *The New Statesman and Nation* seem almost vicious. Her convoluted

prose, however, serves as an index of the tensions at work. West considers Kipling as

a man, loving everything in life but reality, [who] spent his days loathing intellectuals as soft and craven theorists, and yet himself never had the courage to face a single fact that disproved the fairytales he had invented about the world in his youth; and who, nevertheless, was so courageous in defending this uncourageous position that he had to be respected, as one respects a fighting-bull making its last stand.⁵⁹

West, like Orwell, acknowledges the impact of Kipling on her childhood. Reminiscing about Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, she remembers seeing exotically dressed Indian soldiers, and feeling that the Empire was civilising these natives: 'It was an intoxicating thought; and it was mirrored in the work of Rudyard Kipling and nowhere else'.⁶⁰

Others were less appreciative, either of civilising zeal, or Kipling himself. A telling critique comes from the Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand, in a *Left Review* number highlighting Indian nationalist aspirations. In 'Towards a New Indian Literature', Anand argues that 'in the work of Rudyard Kipling and his numerous imitators, we hear the clarion call of an aggressive British Imperialism, the counterpart in fiction of the brutal deeds wrought by the armies of monopoly-capitalism'.⁶¹ For Anand, Kipling is a tarnished figure, though still an important one; Anand concedes 'the almost official nature of [Kipling's] position as spokesman of the Empire'.⁶²

In contrast to Orwell's rather equivocal contention that Kipling merely 'lent his genius' to imperialism, Anand accuses Kipling of fully accepting, indeed promoting, imperialist tenets, including what Anand labels 'Kipling's dogma: a doctrinaire racial theory that a white man is superior to ten natives any day, and that the British Empire is the holiest kingdom of God on earth'.⁶³ A world, in fact, of master race and slave race.

'Shooting an Elephant'

The Autumn 1936 number of *New Writing* contained Orwell's 'Shooting an Elephant'. The genesis of the essay warrants consideration, for Orwell

wrote it only after a request from John Lehmann, the newly-established periodical's editor. Orwell accepted Lehmann's request after waiting unsuccessfully for a friend in London to obtain a copy of the first issue of *New Writing*; Orwell had wanted to gauge *New Writing*'s 'line'. Having accepted, Orwell outlined a 'sketch . . . describing the shooting of an elephant', asking Lehmann to say 'whether it is at all likely to be in your line or not. If not, then I won't write it'.⁶⁴

John Hammond comments that 'it seems incredible that one of the most celebrated essays of modern times was first mooted with such apparent casualness. Fortunately the editor replied that he would indeed be pleased to publish the "sketch"'.⁶⁵ Hammond rightly notes Orwell's apparent casualness, and Lehmann's good fortune in accepting what would become 'Shooting an Elephant'. In fact, however, both Orwell and his proposal neatly fitted Lehmann's requirements.

Like many first issues of 1930s periodicals, *New Writing* carried a 'Manifesto'. In this Lehmann commits the periodical

first and foremost . . . [to] literature, [stating that] . . . though it does not intend to open its pages to writers of reactionary or Fascist sentiments, it is independent of any political party.⁶⁶

Lehmann expresses the desire to promote 'imaginative writing, mainly of young authors', stating that '*New Writing* also hopes to represent the work of writers from colonial and foreign countries'. In the first number foreign writers are highly visible, contributions coming from the U.S.S.R., South Africa, Ireland, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Lehmann's desire to promote young writers, and to establish internationalist credentials for *New Writing*, makes his request to Orwell understandable, though there is no proof that Lehmann specifically asked for something with a colonial slant. Even so, the second number of the periodical did have a colonial bias, containing works by the Trinidadian writer Alfred Mendes and Mulk Raj Anand's 'The Barber's Trade Union'. The first piece in this second number was 'Shooting an Elephant'.

If the narrator in 'A Hanging' primarily is a spectator, that of 'Shooting an Elephant' is the focal point. Though, again, a middle-ranking imperial official, the narrator of the second piece is a far more complex character, and central to the situation he describes. 'Shooting an Elephant' begins:

'In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people – the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me'.⁶⁷ He is the target of physical and verbal abuse for the native population. A pivotal opposition, between individual and group, is established immediately, one that will reverberate through the narrative.

The narrator's position is complicated by the fact that he is antagonistic to the system he ostensibly represents: 'Theoretically – and secretly, of course – I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British'.⁶⁸ Further oppositions are established, between British and Burmese, coloniser and colonised, the powerful and the powerless. Yet, while the narrator's relationship to the large numbers who hate him is clear, he stands in an ambiguous position as regards the other divisions; he is an anti-British Briton, an anti-Empire imperialist, and a figure of power put upon by those over whom he has nominal power.

The complexity of both situation and character is heightened by the the narrator's equivocal condemnation of imperialism. He states that he 'did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it'.⁶⁹ The convoluted sense of time is important. The narrator plausibly confesses not to have known that the British Empire was dying during his time in Burma, but then claims not to know of something still to happen: that the empires that are going to supplant it will be worse. He has no logical way, however, of knowing how the (unspecified) younger empires will operate.

These ambiguities and inconsistencies threaten the narrator's role as a credible eye-witness; his 'character' may be in doubt. Paradoxically, racist and sadistic leanings make him a credible witness. He portrays the native population as laughing 'hideously', of possessing 'sneering little yellow faces', of being 'evil-spirited little beasts'.⁷⁰ With one part of his mind he recognises the British Raj as a tyranny, but with another part the narrator confesses

that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you catch him off duty.⁷¹

This shocking admission functions in two ways. Acknowledgement of the brutalising effect of imperialism on its own functionaries reinforces the

attack on the system. More subtly, however, the narrator appears acutely self-aware and disarmingly honest about his prejudices. In these terms, his account can be believed.

The construction of a self-revelatory narrator precedes the central narrative, the shooting itself. Called upon, as the local representative of imperial power, to put down what supposedly is a rampaging elephant, the narrator on sighting the animal recognises that in the interim it has calmed down. Yet the huge crowd of Burmese which has followed him force the narrator to a moment of crisis:

I realised that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had to do it . . . I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.⁷²

He shoots the elephant. Analysing his actions later, the narrator wonders 'whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool'.⁷³

This opposition of individual and group is fundamentally important. What is striking is the strong sense of personal failure and inadequacy, the fear of looking a fool to the Burmese. In the moment he attempts to overcome these fears by shooting the elephant, in the moment he should triumph over the group, the narrator is the crowd's play thing, 'an absurd puppet'. Drained of any sense of self, the narrator's actions are determined not by personal or imperial dictates, but by 'the will of those yellow faces behind'. The group triumphs over the individual, no matter that the narrator suspects, or hopes, that his true motivations remain hidden.

The dominance of the powerful mass over the impotent individual signals an apparent transfer of power from imperial master to imperial subject. The narrator's existential crisis, it would seem, turns the oppressor into the oppressed. The crisis, however, is that of an individual, and this concentration on the individual deflects attention from larger forces at work. Despite the narrator's claim to recognise the evil of imperialism, the mechanics of imperialism are left untouched. Furthermore, the narrator's human frailties, his apparent self-awareness and self-criticism, creates sympathies which function to validate his own perceptions of the incident. This in turn bolsters the narrator's more general assumptions: the differences between British

and other imperial regimes, the disturbing 'otherness' of the Burmese, and the 'normality' of racism and brutality under imperialism.

The narrator's function as the personification of imperialism is seen clearly in the revelatory claim that 'when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys'. On one level, this appears to indict imperialism, to provide an index of its dehumanising impact. In fact, however, the statement blatantly ignores the effect of imperialism on the local population. Emphasis, and a consequent empathy, on the white man's loss of freedom leaves that of the Burmese unconsidered. This one-sidedness is founded on the opposition of individual and group. The narrator, the solitary, vulnerable individual, is exposed as essentially powerless. In contrast, the Burmese are viewed as a largely undifferentiated, depersonalised mass. Their very amorphousness suggests an ability to resist imposed pressures, to survive the impact of imperialism. The concentration on the narrator's individual crisis forestalls a thorough-going critique of imperialism.

Joining the I.L.P.

'Shooting an Elephant' was published in the autumn of 1936. By December Orwell had set off for the Spanish Civil War, which was to occupy much of his attention and energy, either as combatant or as chronicler, through 1937 and into the following year. Partly by chance, he joined militias connected with the I.L.P.: at first the P.O.U.M. (the I.L.P. equivalent in Spain), then the I.L.P.'s own force. As the next chapter shows, Orwell was mentioned in dispatches in the I.L.P. paper, the *New Leader*. What is important here is that on returning to England after escaping the clutches of the Communists, Orwell's ideas on imperialism take on the tone of the I.L.P. itself.

An indication of this comes in two letters Orwell wrote soon after settling back in England. In the first, to Rayner Heppenstall, Orwell claims that only 'the publications of the I.L.P.' (most obviously the *New Leader*) are reporting truthfully the suppression of revolution in Spain.⁷⁴ In the second, to Geoffrey Gorer, he adopts the stance the *New Leader* had taken as far back as 1935, with the description of India as 'Britain's Slave State'. Orwell writes that '[w]e like to think of England as a democratic country, but our rule in India . . . is just as bad as German

Fascism'. He continues in language that would not be out of place in the *New Leader*, that

[i]f one collaborates with a capitalist-imperialist government in a struggle 'against Fascism', i.e. against a rival imperialism, one is simply letting Fascism in by the back door.⁷⁵

The personal dilemmas of colonial officials here seem as distant politically as they are geographically.

In the middle of 1938 Orwell joined the I.L.P., signalling a change in his views on imperialism. Bernard Crick notes that Orwell was

dogmatic in his espousal of the Left I.L.P. and the P.O.U.M., virtually the Trotskyist, theory of international relations.

War was coming, but it would be an imperialist struggle for markets between Britain, France, Germany and Italy.⁷⁶

The party's economic analysis differed sharply from the essentially moral conception of Empire or imperialism encapsulated in 'A Hanging' or 'Shooting an Elephant'. Those essays look back to a colonial past not far removed from the border skirmishes and overworked officials of Kipling. Contact with the I.L.P. causes Orwell to perceive a more complex interaction of economics and politics. More internationalist than parochial, the I.L.P. analysis of imperialism revealed menacing forces at work.

Orwell partly publicised his new perspective in a brief declarative essay, 'Why I Join The I.L.P.' in the party weekly, the *New Leader*, in June 1938.⁷⁷ The essay will be considered in more detail in later chapters, but has relevance here because it signals a change in Orwell's attitude to imperialism. Orwell's advocacy of the I.L.P. is founded in part on a suspicion that the Labour Party might 'fling every principle overboard in order to prepare for an imperialist war', and the compensatory belief that the I.L.P. 'is the only party which . . . is likely to take the right line either against imperialist war or against Fascism when this appears in its British form'.⁷⁸

Orwell's antagonism to imperialist war fits comfortably within the I.L.P.'s ideological framework. In a speech later published in pamphlet form as 'Pacificism and the Left Wing', I.L.P. spokesman Fenner Brockway distinguishes the party's attitude to class war from that to

imperialist war. Arguing that more people are killed by the operation of the capitalist system than by war, Brockway pledges that the I.L.P. would oppose wars

between the 'democratic' states and the Fascist states We would oppose them because we recognise that they are all capitalist and imperialist wars, arising not from any struggle for democracy and liberty against tyranny, but for rival imperialist interests.⁷⁹

The I.L.P. would continue to hold these views once actual war was declared. By that stage Orwell's views had changed, but till very soon before the outbreak of war he continued to argue against the threat of imperialist conflict.

'Marrakech'

Orwell's involvement with the I.L.P. through 1938 was hampered by health problems. His membership in the party was confirmed and 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' published while he recovered in a Kent sanatorium from the haemorrhaging of a tubercular lesion in the lung.⁸⁰ On the suggestion of doctors, and with the help of an anonymous donation, he and his wife Eileen sailed to Morocco, where they stayed between September 1938 and March 1939. In the spring of 1939, and once again prompted by John Lehmann, Orwell wrote his rarely considered essay, 'Marrakech'.⁸¹ This was published in the Christmas 1939 number of Lehmann's *New Writing*.

'Marrakech' comprises a series of vignettes generated by the apparently reactionary central point that the native people somehow are 'invisible'. In fact, the essay in one important respect marks an advance in Orwell's understanding and depiction of imperialism. For while, in 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant', the Burmese are reduced unconsciously to a state of near-invisibility by their imperial masters, in 'Marrakech' that very act is foregrounded. As with both the earlier essays, the supposed eye-witness, the 'I' of 'Marrakech', functions to categorise and valorise, but the fundamental difference here lies in the recognition both of the narrator's alien status and the consequent inability to comprehend the 'people with brown skins'.

Significantly, the first vignette depicts a Moroccan funeral, the

processes of which create a burial ground without the trappings of European cemeteries: '[n]o gravestone, no name, no identifying mark of any kind. The burying-ground is merely a huge waste of hummocky earth, like a derelict building sight'.⁸² This image metaphorically as well as physically buries the Moroccans as a race from the first, rationalising the subsequent fruitless search for familiarity, and therefore meaning, throughout the essay.

The 'I' of 'Marrakech' wanders amongst beings it finds difficult to construe as human:

Are they really the same flesh as yourself? . . . Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? They rise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone.⁸³

The massive presumption in the last statement (what proof is there that nobody notices?) signals the control of the narrator in determining values within 'Marrakech' the essay, if not the place itself. In a sense, the narrator's perspective drowns those of the native Moroccans.

The dominance of the narrator's perceptions is shown clearly when he gives a coin worth slightly more than a farthing to an old woman. Her reaction elicits a telling interpretation:

She answered with a shrill wail . . . which was partly gratitude but mainly surprise. I suppose that from her point of view, by taking notice of her, I seemed almost to be violating a law of nature. She accepted her status as an old woman, that is to say a beast of burden.⁸⁴

This attempt to understand the point of view of a Moroccan reads not so much as correct supposition as the imposition of the narrator's perspective onto that of the woman. The narrator does not violate a law of nature so much as a law of tourism; the woman's reaction from this angle is just as plausible.

The final vignette in 'Marrakech' concerns a large group of Senegalese soldiers who march past the narrator on their way to an unknown destination. One of the soldiers turns to the narrator with a look the narrator interprets as 'a look of profound respect'.⁸⁵ Ruminating further, he suggests that the soldier 'has feelings of reverence before a

white skin. He has been taught that the white race are his masters, and he still believes it'.⁸⁶ The last remark might be taken as wishful thinking on the narrator's part, but it does reveal his ability within the confines of the essay to lay his own interpretation upon the actions of others. Yet, in this last instance, the sight of a large, potentially powerful group of Africans causes the narrator to consider wider implications, for

there is one thought which every white man . . . thinks when he sees a black army marching past. 'How much longer can we go on kidding these people? How long before they turn their guns in the other direction?'⁸⁷

Unlike the case both in 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant', the indigenous population are shown to possess the potential for political power, not simply the ability to make their colonial rulers feel like puppets. More importantly, however, the questions are left hanging, unanswered. As a result, the final image of the essay, that of the soldiers 'flowing peacefully up the road', carries an undercurrent of menace: what flows peacefully now might one day overflow in anger. These questions give 'Marrakech' a rhetorical vigour it would not otherwise possess. Orwell can be seen using the essay form critically, as a means of querying received assumptions. By way of comparison, in both 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant' a 'message' seems clear: hanging is reprehensible; 'when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom he destroys'. Both essays give answers. 'Marrakech' by contrast, asks questions.

'A Hanging', 'Shooting an Elephant' and 'Marrakech' each purports to give an eye-witness account. Yet, what emerges at this point is the variety of ways in which the viewpoint can be used. This means more than simply saying that the account of an eye-witness is dependent on where the eye-witness stands, literally and figuratively. No doubt a Burmese account of the shooting of an elephant by a colonial official would emphasise different aspects. The eye-witness perspective, however, does allow the creation of empathy between reader and witness, thus making the presented account more plausible. This plausibility in turn permits the deflection of attention, so that in 'A Hanging', the narrator's sensitivity clouds the issue of the power structure at work.

Not all eye-witness accounts work in this way. 'Marrakech' differs from both 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant' in the fact that the

unanswered questions in the essay allow readers to explore beyond the perceptions of the narrator. To this degree, 'Marrakech' is more of an attempt, an 'essay' at the topic. Yet this freedom is lost if the eye-witness in each essay is deemed to be Orwell, never mind the Eric Blair who wrote 'A Hanging'. Readers beguiled by the image of Orwell as the blunt, honest observer can be gulled into naively accepting as gospel what are supposedly eye-witness accounts. There are two points worth noting in this regard: firstly, as the interpretation of 'A Hanging' showed, the narrator need not be taken as Orwell; secondly, the blunt man is not always the honest man.

'Not Counting Niggers'

'Marrakech' can be seen as a singular piece, its existence being dependent upon the imperative that Orwell regain his health in a warm climate. The enforced sojourn, to use Crick's term, temporarily took him away from the increasingly tumultuous political situation in Britain. 'Not Counting Niggers', published in the July 1939 issue of *The Adelphi*, marks Orwell's re-entry into the arena of debate. By the time it published the essay *The Adelphi* had long abandoned its links with the I.L.P. (Murry had resigned from the party in 1934) and, under the editorship of Max Plowman, now maintained a staunchly pacifist line. Orwell had kept in contact with *The Adelphi* throughout the thirties, partly through friendships with such *Adelphi* stalwarts as Jack Common, Max Plowman and Richard Rees. He had also spoken at the 1936 *Adelphi* Summer School. Orwell's contributions to the periodical itself, however, had dwindled to occasional reviews and poems. After the publication of 'A Hanging' in 1931, his next essay in *The Adelphi* did not appear until December 1938.

'Not Counting Niggers' rates as one of Orwell's most polemical essays of the period. It aims a rhetorical scatter-gun at the British Left, contending that

in a prosperous country, above all in an imperialist country, left-wing politics are always partly humbug. There can be no real reconstruction that would not lead to at least a temporary drop in the English standard of life, which is another way of saying that the majority of left-wing politicians and publicists are people who earn a living by demanding something they don't really want.⁸⁸

The cause of the essay's chief gripe lies in Orwell's perception of hypocrisy on the part of the Left. Ignoring the economic reality, that British power wealth had been built on the backs of the subjected imperial races, makes a mockery of the overthrow of the economic system, a plan beloved of the Left. Such an effort necessitates the breakup of the Empire, and with it the inevitable loss of the economic power which underpinned hopes of a prosperous Socialist Britain. The essay forcefully exposes this contradiction.

Encased in 'Not Counting Niggers' is a review of Clarence K. Streit's *Union Now*, which argues for an anti-Fascist bloc of western democracies. Before training his sights upon the book, however, Orwell launches an attack upon the supposed anti-militarists of the Left who in arguing for Peace Blocs, Peace Fronts and Democratic Fronts against the Fascists ignore the iniquities at the heart of the so-called democracies. The Labour Party draws flak for its 'pettifogging grizzle against conscription', but Orwell more sharply targets 'the warriors of the *New Statesman* [sic] . . . pretending that the world is an assemblage of [democratic] sheep and [fascist] goats, neatly partitioned off by national frontiers'.⁸⁹ Faintly praising Streit's book as 'the sheep and goats theory at its best' Orwell also fires a broadside at another Left bastion, suggesting that if the reader cannot accept Streit's version 'you will certainly never accept it in the form handed out by the Left Book Club'.⁹⁰

Orwell's explicit antagonism to two of the institutions of late-30s Left life in Britain has a highly personal aspect. Though he had written occasional reviews and articles for *The New Statesman and Nation* in the early thirties, the relationship between writer and periodical had been rent by the refusal of *The New Statesman and Nation* editor Kingsley Martin to print Orwell's interpretation of the Spanish Civil War.⁹¹ In the case of the Victor Gollancz-inspired Left Book Club, Orwell in one sense had much to be grateful for: *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the club's Monthly Choice for March 1937, had been his bestselling work, and was to remain so until *Animal Farm*. Gollancz had also published his earlier books. Yet Gollancz's rejection of the still-to-be-written *Homage To Catalonia*, and Orwell's conviction (he was not alone) that the Club was in the hands of Communists, fuelled a mutual antagonism.⁹²

The target of 'Not Counting Niggers' remains larger than the individual failings of *The New Statesman and Nation* or the Left Book Club. The essay attacks all those who, under the guise of defending Britain against fascism, merely want the retention of the imperialist status quo. Crucially, for Orwell,

[t]he unspoken clause is always 'not counting niggers'. For how can we make a 'firm stand' against Hitler if [by dismantling the Empire] we are simultaneously weakening ourselves at home? In other words, how can we 'fight Fascism' except by bolstering up a far vaster injustice?

For of course it is vaster. What we forget is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Africa and Asia.⁹³

Orwell fudges any precise definition of 'proletariat' in making his point, but the point itself is clear and controversial.

Controversial, at least, for readers of *The Adelphi*, but orthodox given the arguments of the I.L.P. Orwell had recently joined. Indeed, almost a year before the publication of 'Not Counting Niggers', James Maxton, in a *New Leader* article entitled 'So This Is Empire', puts the same point plainly: 'I say deliberately that the poverty conditions and denial of freedom in the Empire are worse than in the Fascist States of Germany and Italy'.⁹⁴ Fenner Brockway argues similarly in the polemic, 'Has Hitler Anything to Teach Our Ruling Class?', a contribution to the *New Leader's* eight-page 'Empire Special' of April 1938. In this Brockway writes that

[w]e may be free in Britain from the worst tyrannies of Fascism, but they exist in the British Empire. *Hitler cannot teach the British Ruling Class anything in techniques of suppression.*⁹⁵

Brockway, in a published talk with Jawaharlal Nehru, also professes that the I.L.P. would 'give support to the Indian people in their struggle against British Imperialism, whether in circumstances of peace or of war'.⁹⁶ The argument set down in 'Not Counting Niggers' jibes neatly with party orthodoxy. Indeed, within I.L.P. terms, it might even be seen as restrained.

'Not Counting Niggers' was published ostensibly as a book review, illustrating Orwell use of reviews as smoke-screens for what were in fact contentious essays. The fact that it was published in the pacifist *Adelphi*, however, adds immensely to the polemical bite of the piece. While 'Not Counting Niggers' would have merged facelessly with others in the *New Leader*, in *The Adelphi* it operates as might a heckler at a sedate political meeting, unsettling the certainties of those attending. Access to the centre-left pages of *The Adelphi* audience also broadens the impact the short, sharp attacks upon both *The New Statesman* and

Nation and the Left Book Club. Beyond this, the haymaking swipes at 'the majority of left-wing politicians and publicists', and all those who employ 'such phrases as "Peace Bloc", "Peace Front" [and] "Democratic Front"' are more likely to connect with the chins of *The Adelphi's* pacifist audience.

The broadly targetted attack allowed by Orwell's access to *The Adelphi* has implications for the argument of the essay itself. For Orwell in a sense wants to tear away the masks disguising hypocrisy, ignorance and self-interest he sees being worn by many on the Left. The essay incorporates an explicit image of disguise, a

sort of monstrous harlequinade in which everyone is constantly bounding across the stage in a false nose – Quakers shouting for a bigger army, Communists waving Union Jacks, Winston Churchill posing as a democrat.⁹⁷

The absurd alliances generated by the British Empire provide a stick with which to beat the blinkered, ignorant or hypocritical supporters of the status quo. Whereas, in 'Shooting an Elephant', imperialism as a whole was considered in moral terms, as evil, in 'Not Counting Niggers' economics reveals the reality of the process, and underpins the comparisons between the British Empire and fascist Germany:

It is not in Hitler's power . . . to make a penny an hour a normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India, and we are at great pains to keep it so. One gets some idea of the real relationship of England and India when one reflects that the per capita annual income in England is something over £80, and in India about £7.⁹⁸

Though Orwell then utilises the image of 'an Indian coolie's leg . . . thinner than the average Englishman's arm' to reinforce his argument, the image carries less rhetorical weight without the statistic. The bleak economic picture reinforces the attack on those who preach the defence of British power without acknowledging the economic corruption at its base.

'Not Counting Niggers' betokens the development of Orwell's understanding of imperialism beyond the moral arguments of 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant'. Though not particularly detailed in its rendering of the economic realities of imperialism, and clearly influenced by I.L.P.

thinking, the essay marks a highpoint in Orwell's radical criticism of British imperialism. For, with the onset of war, his attack on the iniquities of imperialism is tempered by a desire to defend the nation he had only recently so brutally savaged in *The Adelphi*. He left the I.L.P. at the beginning of the war, he wrote in April 1940, 'because I considered that they were talking nonsense and proposing a line of policy that could only make things easier for Hitler'.⁹⁹ A line, it should be remembered, that Orwell had advocated himself only months earlier.

'My Country Right or Left'

'My Country Right or Left' appeared in the Autumn 1940 number of *Folios of New Writing*, John Lehmann's follow-up to *New Writing*.¹⁰⁰ The essay requires some contextualisation. By the autumn of 1940 the war had gone disastrously for Britain: the Germans had swept through western and northern Europe; France had capitulated; Allied troops had narrowly escaped catastrophe at Dunkirk; the Germans occupied the Channel Islands and had launched air raids on London. The Battle of Britain victory gave out the one dull light of hope. Within this atmosphere, the patriotic vigour of 'My Country Right or Left' approximates the plucky if naive courage of Lehmann's promise that, despite the destruction, 'the Christmas season is not going to pass without NEW WRITING'S [sic] regular appearance'.¹⁰¹

The argument put forward in 'My Country Right or Left' centres around Orwell's notion of patriotic socialism, and will be dealt with in a later chapter. Yet, as regards imperialism, a significant difference exists between 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'My Country Right or Left'. In the later essay, British imperial power plays no part. One vague allusion to Orwell's time in Burma, 'five boring years [spent] within the sound of bugles', is incorporated in an argument to signify the emotional tug of patriotism. Both imperialism as a concept, and comparisons between Hitler and the 'far vaster injustice' of the British Empire, are ignored in 'My Country Right or Left', in favour of a forceful defence of England. This specific focus on an isolated nation (as opposed to a monolithic empire) necessarily accentuates the German threat. A neglect of the imperial wealth Britain still possessed, and the basis on which it was controlled, smooths the path to patriotism. In 'My Country Right or Left', Orwell

belatedly accepts a sheep and goats portrait of political reality.

He was not alone in converting from denouncer of British imperialism to defender of English sovereignty; many individuals and several Left periodicals did likewise. As late as December 1939, John Strachey, writing about 'The War' in the Left Book Club journal *Left News* could write that

[t]he way out for the world does not and cannot lie through the victory of British, French or German Imperialism. The way out lies through the struggle of the people of Britain, France and Germany, and of the people of every other imperial power, against their own Governments.¹⁰²

Strachey continues that Germany's late-1939 proposals that the war be stopped proves that 'British and French Imperialism are the strongest reactionary force in the world today'.¹⁰³ Made in the period of 'phoney war' this statement is less ludicrous than it may now seem. In his defence, Strachey was to modify his views radically once the conflict began in earnest.

As one of the three selectors of books published by the Club, Strachey's views obviously carried clout within the pages of the *Left News*. Only five months later, however, Victor Gollancz, Strachey's co-selector, and the dominant force in the Left Book Club, published an 'Open Letter' to the Communist Party of Great Britain, criticising that party's view that the war was simply an imperialist battle. In 'The C[ommunist] P[arty], Revolutionary Defeatism, and The "People's Convention"', published in the January 1941 issue of the *Left News*, Gollancz vilifies the Communist Party view that '[a]n imperialist war is against the interests of the working class of all the belligerent powers: and [that] in such a war it is irrelevant to the working class who "wins"'.¹⁰⁴ Gollancz goes on to attack the notion that '[a]ll the warring governments are equally the enemies of the working class as a whole: and [that] it is accordingly the warring governments that the working class must fight'.¹⁰⁵ Gollancz disparages this as 'revolutionary defeatism', though it clearly approaches what Strachey had expressed as late as December 1939 in the *Left News* itself.

The Communist Party was not the only political group to continue to perceive the war as an imperialist struggle. The January 1941 *Left News* carries the 'Statement of Policy' to be submitted at the Easter conference of Orwell's erstwhile political party, the I.L.P.¹⁰⁶ This proposal opposes both the Government and the war as built on capitalism, imperialism and nationalism, all of which the I.L.P. strove to overthrow. The purpose

of the war, it argues, is the maintenance of both the British Empire and capitalist interests. The statement registers the consistency (or perhaps the rigidity) of I.L.P. thinking on imperialism through the period of the late 1930s and into the war years. It serves as a yardstick for the political distance Orwell had travelled.

'The Ruling Class'

Orwell briefly but tellingly considers the British Empire in another essay published late in 1940. 'The Ruling Class' appeared in the December number of *Horizon*. Inhabiting the space vacated as a result of the closure of several literature-oriented periodicals in 1939, *Horizon* wore its aestheticism on its sleeve. Yet essays like 'The Ruling Class' register *Horizon's* concern with the world beyond literary boundaries. 'The Ruling Class' was taken from a longer essay, 'The Lion and The Unicorn', Orwell's argument for British socialism. That Orwell chose to publish part of a longer work in a periodical indicates his recognition that the medium provided ready access to an audience. In respect of Orwell's stance on imperialism, the chief importance of 'The Ruling Class' lies in his depiction of that class. Acknowledging that 'England is the most class-ridden country under the sun', Orwell argues that '[o]ne of the dominant facts in English life in the past three quarters of a century has been the decay of ability in the ruling class'.¹⁰⁷ Decay implies past health, and Orwell considers that, during that now distant time, 'it was fair to say that life within the British Empire was in many ways better than life outside it'.¹⁰⁸ For whom, and in what way it might be better is not specified. Orwell reinforces this defence of the ruling class later in the essay, writing that

[t]he British Empire was peaceful as no area of comparable size has ever been. As people to live under . . . the British ruling class had their points. They were preferable to the truly modern men, the Nazis and Fascists.¹⁰⁹

As with 'My Country Right or Left', 'The Ruling Class' signals the extent of Orwell's political journey from the I.L.P. In contrast to the stark economic reading of imperialism presented in 'Not Counting Niggers', Orwell returns to an earlier theme in order to analyse the

imperial masters. He writes that 'the English ruling class are *morally* fairly sound', proof being their willingness to die for their country in battle.

This could not happen if these people were the cynical scoundrels that they are sometimes declared to be . . . What is to be expected of them is not treachery, or physical cowardice, but stupidity, unconscious sabotage, an infallible instinct for doing the wrong thing. They are not wicked, or altogether wicked; they are merely unteachable.¹¹⁰

The ruling class portrayed here is made up not of Beaverbrooks or Rothermeres, but of Bertie Woosters.

The use of a moral yardstick by which to measure both the ruling class and its control of the Empire harks back to the stance adopted in essays like 'A Hanging', 'Rudyard Kipling' and 'Shooting an Elephant'. Yet a definite development can be detected in 'The Ruling Class', and 'The Lion and The Unicorn', the consideration of imperialism now being carried out within a larger argument for an indigenous socialism. The decline of the imperial rulers is seen as a type of political obsolescence, rather than resulting from the collapse of the economic foundations of empire, as might have been hoped for and predicted by those on the borders of radical left thought.

Orwell, by contrast, attempts to salvage what might still be of worth from the imperial days. These attempts are sporadic, but they necessarily cast him in the occasional role of apologist for the iniquities of imperialism. As with the essays of the early and middle-thirties which deal with imperialism, Orwell focuses attention on the British, at the expense of the local victims of imperialism. And, given that the moral soundness of the British is accepted as a given, the consequent portrait can largely ignore the excesses of imperialism in favour of an assessment of 'decency'.

'The Ruling Class' does not mark the end of Orwell's treatment of imperialism; far from it. Yet his essays on the subject to 1941 chart a complex and sometimes contradictory path. What emerges from the examination of Orwell's essays in this chapter is that Orwell adopts a variety of approaches to imperialism. Certain fragments of arguments recur: that imperialism is evil; that the Left is hypocritical in its analysis; that the British Empire remains preferable to the modern totalitarian

alternatives, and less evil than its contemporaries. Some of these ideas, submerged at one time, resurface at others.

In broad terms, Orwell can be seen to abandon the moral perspective which marked his earlier view, in favour of an economic model in the late 1930s. With the coming of war, the moral view returns, linked to a defence of the Empire he had once vilified. No systematic analysis of imperialism emerges over the period; what theory Orwell does apply can often be recognised as coming from others. Despite his time in Burma, Orwell was never an original thinker on the subject of imperialism.

What should be clear from the preceding analysis is the importance of locating Orwell's ideas and arguments within the context of the multitude of periodicals in which his essays were published. As this chapter has shown, the genesis of particular essays can only be fully appreciated through an understanding of those periodicals. Beyond this, comprehension of the wider sphere in which all periodicals operated provides a crucial means of not only understanding the developments, contradictions and inconsistencies of Orwell's thought, but also their many strengths. The resulting analysis requires the revision of those characterisations which model Orwell as the blunt, honest outsider, the omniscient teller of truths. What emerges from a study of Orwell's periodical essays of the thirties and early forties is the extent to which he was fundamentally of his time, simply one voice in a chorus of voices. At no time in the thirties did those voices have as much to shout, harangue, praise and protest about as in the years of the Spanish Civil War, the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', *New Writing*, (Autumn 1936), pp. 1-7. *CEJL I*, pp. 235-42.
- 2 George Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', *The Adelphi* (July 1939), pp. 468-73. *CEJL I*, pp. 394-8.
- 3 George Orwell, 'The Ruling Class' *Horizon* (December 1940), pp. 318-23. *CEJL I*, pp. 67-73.
- 4 For further details, see Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London, 1980), pp. 76-103.
- 5 George Orwell, 'A Hanging', *The Adelphi* (August 1931), pp. 417-22. *CEJL I*, pp. 44-68.
- 6 The list includes only those pieces published before the end of 1941.
- 7 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*

- (London, 1972), p. 164.
- 8 George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell* (Boston, 1966), p. 82.
 - 9 Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (London, 1984), p. 17. Any attempt to pin Williams down to a simple view on any single aspect of Orwell is fraught with problems. Williams markedly changed his position on Orwell over time. For a review of these changes, see John Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St. George Orwell'* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 188–200.
 - 10 Crick, p. 31.
 - 11 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 1. *CEJL I*, p. 326.
 - 12 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 472. *CEJL I*, p. 397.
 - 13 J.A.Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, (London, 1903); revised edition, 1938. Quotations used are taken from the revised edition.
 - 14 Hobson, p. 3.
 - 15 Hobson, p. 7.
 - 16 Hobson, p. 27.
 - 17 Hobson, p. 3.
 - 18 Figures have been rounded off. The complete figures can be found in Hobson, pp. 369–71.
 - 19 V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow, 1982), p. 7.
 - 20 John Strachey, *The Coming Struggle For Power* (London, 1933); Ralph Fox, *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism* (London, 1933). These books will be considered later in this chapter.
 - 21 Leonard Woolf, *Imperialism and Civilisation* (London, 1928).
 - 22 'India and the Conference', *The New Statesman*, 12 July 1930, 432–3 (p. 432). The Simon constitution derived from the efforts of the Simon Commission, set up by the Baldwin government in 1927 to analyse the Indian situation. The Commission's report, which appeared in 1930, was seen as difficult to implement. For a critical contemporary view, see Fox, pp. 63–7.
 - 23 'The Round Table Adjourns', *The New Statesman*, 24 January 1931, 456–7 (p. 456).
 - 24 H.N.Brailsford, 'The Future of the Indian Worker', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 4 July 1931, pp. 5–6.
 - 25 'The Indian Tragedy', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 14 November 1931, pp. 600–1. 'The Indian Impasse', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 7 May 1932, pp. 576–7. 'Going Backwards in India', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 2 July 1932, p. 4.
 - 26 For an account of the early days of *The Adelphi*, see F.A.Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* (London, 1959), pp. 105–109.
 - 27 *CEJL I*, p. 15.
 - 28 Woodcock, p. 75.
 - 29 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 419. *CEJL I*, p. 45.
 - 30 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 422. *CEJL I*, p. 48.
 - 31 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 419. *CEJL I*, p. 46.
 - 32 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 420. *CEJL I*, p. 46.
 - 33 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 420. *CEJL I*, p. 47.
 - 34 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 422. *CEJL I*, p. 48.
 - 35 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 421. *CEJL I*, p. 47.

- 36 Orwell, 'A Hanging', p. 420. *CEJL I*, p. 47.
- 37 Woodcock, p. 77.
- 38 Christopher Hollis, *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and his Works* (London, 1956), p. 39.
- 39 Cyril Connolly, review of *Burmese Days*, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 6 July 1935, p. 18.
- 40 'The Best Books of 1935', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 25 January 1936, pp. 125-6.
- 41 The question of foresight runs through C.E.M.Joad's critical review of the book. Published under the title 'Mr. Strachey's Prophecy', Joad suggests that 'we have only to turn Mr. Strachey's methods of diagnosis against himself, and the whole of his formidable analysis may be dismissed as a projection of the author's subjective reaction to present-day politics'. Joad does not 'suggest that Mr. Strachey may not be right; merely, that he is not inevitably right'. Whether right or wrong, however, Strachey provides a clear example of an economic analysis of imperialism. C.E.M.Joad, 'Mr. Strachey's Prophecy', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 12 November 1932, pp. 600-2.
- 42 Fox, pp. 33-7.
- 43 Fox, p. 11.
- 44 James Maxton, 'Our Cracking Empire: The Beginning of the End of Capitalist Imperialism', *New Leader*, 8 December 1933, 1-2 (p. 2).
- 45 Jawaharlal Nehru, 'India's Struggle Against British Imperialism - Against Indian Capitalism', *New Leader*, 9 March 1934, p. 2.
- 46 Reginald Reynolds, 'This Empire of Ours', *New Leader*, 5 November 1934, p. 2.
- 47 'Britain's Slave State', *New Leader*, 1 February 1935, p. 2.
- 48 'The Problems of Colonial Empire', *The New Statesman and Nation*, Part I, 12 October 1935, pp. 472-4; Part II, 19 October 1935, pp. 550-1.
- 49 'Problems of Empire', *New Statesman*, p. 473.
- 50 Details of Anand in footnote 61. Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Campaign for Indian Liberties', *Left Review*, (September 1936), pp. 624-6.
- 51 'National Liberties', editorial in *Left Review*, (September 1936), 601-2 (p. 601).
- 52 'National Liberties', *Left Review*, p. 601.
- 53 George Orwell, review of *Tropic of Cancer*, *New English Weekly*, 14 November 1935, pp. 96-7. *CEJL I*, pp. 154-6.
- 54 George Orwell, 'Rudyard Kipling', *New English Weekly*, 23 January 1936, p. 289. *CEJL I*, pp. 159-60. In *CEJL I*, the essay title is given as '[On Kipling's Death]', possibly to distinguish it from the longer essay, 'Rudyard Kipling', in *CEJL II*, pp. 184-97.
- 55 Orwell, 'Kipling', p. 289. *CEJL I*, p. 160.
- 56 Orwell, 'Kipling', p. 289. *CEJL I*, p. 159.
- 57 Orwell, 'Kipling', p. 289. *CEJL I*, pp. 159-60.
- 58 Orwell, 'Kipling', p. 289. *CEJL I*, p. 160.
- 59 Rebecca West, 'Rudyard Kipling', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 25 January 1936, 112-4 (p. 112).
- 60 West, p. 113.
- 61 Mulk Raj Anand, 'Towards a New Indian Literature', *Left Review*, (September 1936), 613-23 (p. 617).
- 62 Anand, p. 617.

- 63 Anand, p. 618.
- 64 George Orwell, letter to John Lehmann, 27 May 1936, in *CEJL I*, p. 221. For Lehmann's account see, John Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery: Autobiography I*, (London, 1955), pp. 245–7.
- 65 John Hammond, *A George Orwell Companion: A guide to the novels, documentaries and essays* (London, 1982), p. 214.
- 66 John Lehmann, 'Manifesto', *New Writing*, (Spring 1936), p.v.
- 67 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 1. *CEJL I*, p. 235.
- 68 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 1. *CEJL I*, p. 236.
- 69 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 1. *CEJL I*, p. 236.
- 70 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 1. *CEJL I*, p. 236.
- 71 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 2. *CEJL I*, p. 236.
- 72 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 239.
- 73 Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', p. 7. *CEJL I*, p. 242.
- 74 George Orwell, letter to Rayner Heppenstall, 31 July 1937, *CEJL I*, 278–80 (p. 279).
- 75 George Orwell, letter to Geoffrey Gorer, 15 September 1937, *CEJL I*, 283–5 (p. 284).
- 76 Crick, p. 246.
- 77 George Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 24 June 1938, p. 4. Erroneously titled 'Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party' in *CEJL I*, pp. 336–6.
- 78 Orwell, 'Why I Join', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 338.
- 79 Fenner Brockway, 'Pacifism And The Left Wing' (London, 1938), p. 16.
- 80 See Crick, pp. 241–44.
- 81 George Orwell, 'Marrakech', *New Writing* (Christmas 1939), pp. 272–7. *CEJL I*, pp. 387–93. As an indication of the neglect of the essay by commentators, Hammond, p. 67, allots the essay only seven lines, half of which contains a quotation. Crick does not include the essay in the index of his biography.
- 82 Orwell, 'Marrakech', p. 272. *CEJL I*, p. 388.
- 83 Orwell, 'Marrakech', p. 272. *CEJL I*, p. 388.
- 84 Orwell, 'Marrakech', p. 275. *CEJL I*, p. 391.
- 85 Orwell, 'Marrakech', p. 276. *CEJL I*, p. 392.
- 86 Orwell, 'Marrakech', p. 276. *CEJL I*, p. 393.
- 87 Orwell, 'Marrakech', p. 277. *CEJL I*, p. 393.
- 88 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 468. *CEJL I*, p. 394.
- 89 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 470. *CEJL I*, p. 395.
- 90 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 470. *CEJL I*, p. 396.
- 91 This will be dealt with in the next chapter.
- 92 Orwell's relationship with Gollancz is explored in several chapters.
- 93 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 472. *CEJL I*, p. 397.
- 94 James Maxton, 'So this is Empire!', *New Leader*, 19 August 1938, pp. 4–5.
- 95 Fenner Brockway, 'Has Hitler Anything to Teach Our Ruling Class?', *New Leader*, 29 April 1938, iv–v (p.v).
- 96 Fenner Brockway, 'India in the Coming War', *New Leader*, 1 July 1938, p. 3.
- 97 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 469. *CEJL I*, p. 395.
- 98 Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', p. 472. *CEJL I*, p. 397.
- 99 George Orwell, '[Autobiographical Note]', *CEJL II*, 23–4 (p. 23).

- 100 George Orwell, 'My Country Right of Left', *Folios of New Writing*, (Autumn 1940), pp. 36-41. *CEJL I*, pp. 35-40. The essay is considered at greater length in later chapters.
- 101 John Lehmann, 'Dear Reader', *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940), p. 5.
- 102 John Strachey, 'The War', *Left News* (December 1939), 1409-11 (p. 1411).
- 103 Strachey, p. 1411.
- 104 Victor Gollancz, 'The C.P., Revolutionary Defeatism, and the "People's Convention"', *Left News*, (January 1941), 1598-1603, (p. 1598).
- 105 Gollancz, p. 1598.
- 106 'I.L.P. Statement of Policy' (submitted to the Easter 1941 party conference), *Left News* (January 1941), pp. 1617-8.
- 107 Orwell, 'The Ruling Class', p. 319. *CEJL II*, p. 69.
- 108 Orwell, 'The Ruling Class', p. 320. *CEJL II*, p. 69.
- 109 Orwell, 'The Ruling Class', p. 321. *CEJL II*, p. 71.
- 110 Orwell, 'The Ruling Class', p. 323. *CEJL II*, pp. 72-3.

Blood and Ink: The Spanish Civil War

It is becoming more and more clear that the Spanish Civil War is the key event of post-War history. Nothing since 1918 has given us so terrible a warning: but nothing also has been so pregnant with hope.

Editorial in *Left News*, January 1938.¹

[T]he Left Wing has inherited ideas of fair play which perhaps hinder its propaganda.

Charles Fenby, *The Political Quarterly*, 1937.²

The whole of this story is in the words of the men who took part in it. It consists entirely of extracts from letters to John McNair from Bob Smillie, Eric Blair, Albert Gross and Paddy Donovan.

'Night Attack on the Aragon Front', *New Leader*, April 30, 1937.³

Hindsight can obscure as well as reveal, placing valuations on historical episodes at odds with those of the people who experienced them. Such seems true fifty years after the end of the Spanish Civil War. To modern minds, that conflict can seem simply a precursor to the vastly more destructive war which followed. Yet the quotation above from the *Left News* conveys a sense of the importance the Spanish Civil War had for many on the Left at the time. The combatants represented, at least to their supporters, rival ideologies angling for domination in Europe. In an analysis of British public opinion on the war, *New Statesman and Nation* editor Kingsley Martin wrote that the war exemplified the 'increasing clarity of the international choice between Fascism and Socialism'.⁴ There were no doubts about which side Martin would choose.

Martin did not actually fight in Spain, but he nevertheless played a role in the skirmishes taking place in Britain over the war's assessment. The Spanish Civil War was one of perceptions as well as battles, of ink as well as blood. It was fought both inside and outside Spain, between rival commanders in Madrid and (on a far smaller scale) between rival editors in London. This crucial interplay between events in Britain and those in Spain must be recognised when analysing Orwell's essays

on Spain. Martin, for one, would directly influence the publication of Orwell's analysis of the conflict.

Charles Fenby's comment above, about the hindering of left wing propaganda, foregrounds the need to persuade over the duty to present objective fact. Fenby champions better – not less – propaganda. Once again, the views of a practising editor like Martin have a particular relevance. Arguing later that the British press 'was almost entirely in the hands of anti-Republican propaganda', he commented that 'I didn't see it as my function to play the other side's game'.⁵ Martin's personalisation of the propaganda battle reveals the extent to which those in positions of power, including editorial power, could determine perceptions on the Spanish Civil War. He also reveals an adversarial approach to the representation of the Spanish situation.

Orwell was to fall victim to the general argument Martin sets out, though in a highly specific manner. Martin refused to publish some of Orwell's reports on Spain, later justifying his decision by describing it as

violent anti-Negrin propaganda [Negrin led the Republican Government] – and of course anti-Communist too. I would no more have thought of publishing *them* than of publishing an article by Goebbels during the war against Germany.⁶

For the fervently committed, the stakes were that high.

Orwell was to get his views on Spain published, but, ironically, some of these have been muffled in the years since they first appeared. The general reader searches in vain for such short essays as 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' or 'Caesarean Section in Spain' amongst the various collections of Orwell's work. These pieces were originally published in obscure and now largely forgotten periodicals: *Controversy*, and *The Highway*, respectively.⁷ This obscurity does absolve the majority of anthologists for not including those essays, and consequently critics for not considering them. The same absolution can not be granted so easily to the editors of *CEJL*, however, for while both periodicals rate a mention in the index, neither essay is included. This chapter examines these neglected essays, incorporating them into an analysis of Orwell's writings on the Spanish Civil War.

A central problem for those in Britain trying to understand the Spanish Civil War was the dearth of information. As Kingsley Martin notes in a 1936 survey of press coverage, '[f]rom the beginning, the news from

Spain was curiously contradictory'.⁸ A leader comment in *Time and Tide* in August 1936, months before Orwell himself would go to Spain, put the point baldly, stating that it is 'quite impossible to form a general picture of what is happening in Spain. The news is fragmentary and unreliable'.⁹ That very paucity of information created the conditions in which the depiction of events could be manipulated.

While left-leaning periodicals such as *Left Review* and *Time and Tide* suffered from a lack Spanish sources, and were only able to give secondhand accounts, other marginal newspapers and periodicals were able to send their own correspondents to Spain. Frank Pitcairn, from the *Daily Worker*, was reporting from Barcelona 'a few days after the Franco landings in the South', according to the official history of the paper.¹⁰ *The New Statesman and Nation* carried the eye-witness reports of Geoffrey Brereton, Cyril Connolly and Liston Oak. The I.L.P. *New Leader* had something of a headstart in this regard, for in previous years the weekly had included first-hand accounts from Jennie Lee and Ellen Wilkinson.¹¹ The war naturally intensified that policy, particularly given the presence of an I.L.P. militia in Spain. *New Leader* published eye-witness reports from I.L.P. activists John McNair, John McGovern, Jennie Lee, Bob Edwards, as well as by George Orwell.¹²

This apparent glut of eye-witness reports wrongly suggests that the Spanish Civil War was more than adequately covered by Left periodicals and newspapers. The final quotation at the head of the chapter suggests that simply telling a 'story . . . in the words of the men [including Eric Blair] who took part in it' offers a way to the truth. Yet the obvious shortcoming of this method remains that other eye-witnesses can provide conflicting reports. The situation is difficult enough in a court of law, where one witness's testimony can be refuted by another's, but where the 'witnesses' are political enemies, the air can quickly fizz with claim and counter claim. This situation becomes perversely complicated when, as in the vituperative skirmishes between the Communist Party of Great Britain and the I.L.P., the 'enemies' are fighting ostensibly for the same cause. The eye-witness perspective, partly examined in relation to Orwell's views on imperialism, assumes a crucial importance during the Spanish conflict.

Orwell became involved in this poisonous argument when he joined the I.L.P. contingent in Barcelona at the end of 1936. In fact, however, before Orwell's feet touched Spanish soil, the battlelines had already been drawn in Britain between the Communist Party and the I.L.P. The ideological brawls which preceded the war were only intensified when

each took up the rival claims of parties fighting in Spain. Naturally, the British Communists sided with their Spanish namesakes. The I.L.P. championed the cause of the *Partido Obrero de Unificación*, or P.O.U.M. The antagonisms of the two Spanish parties mirrored those of their British counterparts, as can be gauged from the title of Fenner Brockway's *New Leader* article, 'What I Saw in Spain: Facts About the Communist Conspiracy Against POUM'.¹³ Brockway gives an eye-witness account in order to rebut the Communist reading of events.

Orwell's own September 1937 *New Leader* article, 'That Mysterious Cart', also grounds itself on a first-hand account, containing his statement refuting charges made in the *Daily Worker* of the duplicity and defeatism of the P.O.U.M.. To emphasise its veracity, Orwell's fellow militia men countersigned the statement.¹⁴ Ironically, the *Daily Worker* allegations had been made by F.A. Frankfort, who claimed to have been an I.L.P. supporter. Orwell had in fact fought alongside Frankfort in a battle described in the *New Leader* report, 'Night Attack in Aragon', from which the quotation at the beginning of this chapter is drawn. Friends were not easy to distinguish from foes during the Spanish conflict.

In an odd twist, Orwell's participation in the battles fought with bullets in Spain took him away from the verbal conflict on Spain already taking place in London in late 1936 and early 1937. Not that Orwell was ignorant of the struggle; in a letter written from Barcelona to his publisher Victor Gollancz in London, he writes

I hope I shall get a chance to write the truth about what I have seen. The stuff appearing in the English papers is largely the most appalling lies – more I can't say, owing to the censorship. If I can get back in August [1937] I hope to have a book ready for you about the beginning of next year.¹⁵

A month later, convalescing in Barcelona from a bullet wound to the throat, he writes to Cyril Connolly, praising Connolly's own *New Statesman and Nation* article on Spain, adding that

[i]t is a credit to the *New Statesman* [sic] that it is the only paper, apart from a few obscure ones such as the *New Leader*, where any but the Communist viewpoint has ever got through.¹⁶

From the vantage point hindsight allows, these letters seem plump with forlorn hopes and false predictions. Within days of recovering from

his throat injury, Orwell was fleeing Spain with his wife, hounded by Communist police. On his return to England, he found that Gollancz refused to publish the as yet unwritten *Homage To Catalonia*. Orwell was also to experience the discreditable side of *The New Statesman and Nation*, which refused to print both a proposed piece on the war from the viewpoint of the P.O.U.M. and his review of Franz Borkenau's study, *The Spanish Cockpit*. So much for the censorship in Spain.

Eventually, Orwell was able to find outlets for his views: Frederic Warburg agreed to publish *Homage To Catalonia*, and Orwell's essays and reviews appeared in such periodicals as *The New English Weekly*, *Time and Tide*, and *Controversy*. The availability of these alternatives suggests Habermas's concept of an accessible public sphere. In the ideal model, Habermas envisages a variety of periodicals promoting a number of viewpoints. The analysis of Orwell's essays on the Spanish Civil War, however, shows the gap between the ideal and the reality. Orwell's views were often consciously denied publication by those, like Martin and Gollancz, who previously had been willing to publish him. Getting 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' published in a marginal periodical like *Controversy* hardly equates with having the essay accepted by a journal with the prestige and audience of *The New Statesman and Nation*. This aspect must be acknowledged if a proper assessment of the essay is to be made.

Orwell's essays on Spain receive little attention from modern critics, essentially because of the forceful clarity of *Homage To Catalonia*, his full-length account of the Spanish Civil War. The book now enjoys the status of a classic, and appears as source material in numerous histories of the war.¹⁷ Yet in its own time, the book was a commercial disaster, selling only 683 copies in its first six months; this for a book written to have an immediate impact.¹⁸ To put this in some perspective, Orwell's previous book, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, after being chosen Book of the Month by Gollancz's Left Book Club, had sold more than 40,000 copies.¹⁹ What sank the book, at least in part, were negative reviews in such periodicals as the *Daily Worker* and *The New Statesman and Nation*. In essence, the book fell victim to the internecine rivalries fought out in the public sphere.

More than 683 people read Orwell's essays. They also read them soon: after Orwell's return to England, the natural outcome of the speed at which the essays could be written and published. Though Orwell could not have known that *Homage To Catalonia* would flop, he did recognise the polemical nature of the book. In a letter to Geoffrey Gorer he writes

that certain elements of the left-wing press will 'get a nasty jar when my book comes out'.²⁰ Until that time, periodical essays provided him with the ammunition he needed to carry on the rhetorical fight.

Two points are worth adding before the essays themselves are examined. Firstly, essays were not Orwell's only means of publicising his views speedily; he also exploited the opportunity offered by reviews of books on Spain to prosecute his case. Secondly, while for those involved in the war its importance seemed self-evident, a quotation from *The Times* puts this fervour in some perspective:

[T]he conflict is regarded with the greatest detachment, except by a small group of enthusiasts on either side and is commonly recognised to be an internal affair among the Spaniards themselves, with which foreigners should have as little to do as possible.²¹

The Times may be overplaying the degree of detachment, but the claim cannot be dismissed lightly.

As with other debates in which sections of the British Left were involved in the thirties, a danger exists that the sincere commitment of individuals or relatively small groups becomes falsely magnified as a popular concern. Certainly the periodicals within which Orwell's views were published remained only a small, highly politicised subset of broad opinion. Small fires can still blaze bright, and the heat given off by the debates on Spain often had a scorching intensity.

'Spilling the Spanish Beans'

'Spilling the Spanish Beans' was completed in July 1937, only weeks after Orwell had returned from Spain. In a letter to Rayner Heppinstall written at the end of that month, Orwell complains that a proposal for an essay, at first accepted by *The New Statesman and Nation*, was later rejected once the position adopted became clear.²² That essay was 'Eye-witness in Barcelona'. A rebuttal for 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', an essay from a similar perspective, could be taken as read. 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' was accepted by the *New English Weekly*, and published in two parts.²³ The choice was not surprising: Orwell had reviewed for the periodical since 1932, and *The New English Weekly* had published his essay, 'In Defence of the Novel', a month before he departed for Spain.

As the title warns, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' sets out to divulge the 'truth' and, implicitly, to unsettle preconceptions. The initial line of attack itself constitutes a surprise, however, for the essay begins not by depicting or analysing the situation in Spain, but by charging headlong at the left-wing British press:

The Spanish Civil War has probably produced a richer crop of lies than any event since the Great War of 1914–18, but I honestly doubt, in spite of all those hecatombs of nuns raped and crucified before the eyes of *Daily Mail* reporters whether it is the pro-Fascist newspapers that have done the most harm.²⁴

The qualified criticism of the rabidly conservative *Daily Mail* conceals a rhetorical feint, for the real targets of this opening barrage are revealed immediately as 'the left-wing papers, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Worker*, [who] with their far subtler methods of distortion . . . have prevented the British public from grasping the true nature of the struggle'.²⁵

These assertions constitute a substantial challenge to left-wing self-perception of its reporting of the Spanish Civil War. Crucially, the accusations go unsubstantiated, but that very lack of presented evidence serves to reinforce the suspicion of something being employed subtly. The crude exaggerations of the *Daily Mail*, Orwell implies, can be recognised easily, then defused or dismissed. The sophisticated methods of the Left, by contrast, resist such simple detection, and function more damagingly as a consequence.

The opening paragraph begs several questions: what does constitute the 'true nature of the struggle?', and have left-wing British papers done more harm than their pro-Fascist competitors? While the former question provides the focus of attention in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', the latter receives no real answer. Orwell's targets are left-wing papers, and a detailed comparison of the harm done by both political wings would only delay him from his real purpose. *Daily Mail* readers are left alone to read about the crucifixion of nuns over breakfast.

This patently lop-sided argument, whereby right-wing papers are absolved of their sins, while the left-wing papers are damned for theirs, clearly runs counter to the arguments for more persuasive Left propaganda set out at the beginning of this chapter by Charles Fenby and Kingsley Martin. Orwell, however, demands truth, not propaganda from the Left. Curiously then, in his assessment of the harm done

by both sides, Orwell conveniently neglects the fact that in 1937 the circulation of the *Daily Mail* surpassed one and a half million, more than that of the *Daily Worker* and the *News Chronicle* combined.²⁶ Admittedly, circulation figures of themselves cannot designate influence; neither, however, can they be ignored easily.

Putting the opening paragraph under the microscope reveals logical holes, if not plain inconsistencies. Nevertheless, as a piece of polemic, the paragraph works: it immediately engages the attention, setting out certain basic though contentious premises, and, with the suggestion of a concealed truth about to be revealed, draws the reader on. This results partly from characteristics inherent in the essay form. Accusations of rich crops of lies and subtle methods of distortion do not require the detailed substantiation expected in a fully worked out thesis. As a consequence, the essay can carry out the function suggested by Adorno, operating as a 'critique . . . accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total'. Orwell subtly weaves this critical aspect into the opening paragraph of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' with a phrase that might act as a leitmotif of his essays: the words, 'I honestly doubt'.

Each word warrants attention. As Chapter Two showed, Orwell employs the first person pronoun in a variety of ways; 'I' functioned to different effect as imperial witness, catalyst, or tourist. 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' (published in July 1937) contains the information that '[w]hen I left Barcelona in late June the jails were bulging'.²⁷ Orwell emphasises the contemporaneity of the account for several reasons: it supersedes earlier reports; the sense of potential chaos conveyed by the word 'bulging' suggests a situation still unresolved; as 'news', the essay supposedly comes to the reader largely unadulterated.

The final point distinguishes 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' from, say, 'Shooting an Elephant', for, even if the latter essay is accepted as autobiographical, the time gap between the event and its recounting raises the suspicion that Orwell altered details to suggest a moral dimension discerned after the shooting. In 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', by contrast, the speed at which the first-hand account reaches the reader implies a relative lack of manipulation. The potential for the manipulation of the facts lies at the very core of Orwell's argument. The plausibility of that argument nevertheless depends on the 'honesty' of the account. As he had done in 'Shooting an Elephant', Orwell establishes a tension between an individual and a large, malevolent force: in the earlier essay, between the imperial official and the Burmese; in this, the eye-witness on the one hand, and the (relatively) powerful Left

press on the other. In both essays, truthful perception comes from the individual.

The situation of the individual is different in the two essays, however, for while in 'Shooting an Elephant' the narrator provides all the relevant information, in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' much of the information has been supplied already by newspapers and periodicals. The eye-witness in the later essay provides information at odds with that already published. At the same time as he gives an alternative account of events in Spain, the eye-witness explicitly registers doubt at the accepted depiction. As much as establishing his own case, Orwell attempts to demolish those of others.

The analysis of the essay's first paragraph prepares the ground for a more rapid advance through the overall argument. The begged question in the opening foray, what constitutes the 'true nature of the struggle', receives the following answer in the second paragraph:

The fact that these [left-wing] papers have so carefully obscured is that the Spanish Government . . . is far more afraid of the revolution than the Fascists . . . there is no doubt whatever about the thoroughness with which it is crushing its own revolutionaries.²⁸

As with the bold assertion of the harm done by the left-wing newspapers, this statement challenges Left orthodoxies on the situation in Spain. Orwell argues that these tenets are themselves distortions of reality. Underpinning his own position lies the belief that there exists a bedrock of facts, a clearly perceivable reality, which various political groups and newspapers are manipulating. The battle between those consciously distorting perceptions and those attempting to transmit the truth provides the focus for this essay.

Not surprisingly, given the rhetoric of perceivable and manipulated truth, physical and linguistic forms of misrepresentation and distortion abound in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans'. The linguistic variety are the more pervasive and ominous, especially given that Orwell's primary targets are the purveyors of false reports, but physical disguises and hybrids also have significant parts to play. In the first instance Orwell decries 'the grotesque spectacle of Communists assailed as wicked "Reds" by right-wing intellectuals [he cites Wyndham Lewis] who are in essential agreement with them'.²⁹

While the rendering of this grotesque spectacle remains sketchy, Orwell introduces the crucial notion of an eccentric, sinister fusion

of elements. Another combination receives more vivid treatment in the next paragraph, where an 'uneasy alliance' of the Spanish bourgeoisie and peasantry is said to have 'about as much vitality, and about as much right to exist, as a pig with two heads or some other Barnum and Bailey monstrosity'.³⁰ The hyperbole of this image should not detract from the fact that, where diverse elements are brought together in Orwell's work, they signal impurity and duplicity.

Disguise also functions as an index of perversion or subversion of political ideals. In the early days of the revolution, Orwell argues, when power was temporarily the property of the Spanish workers, 'the bourgeoisie had to lie low and even (this was still happening when I reached Spain in December) to disguise themselves as workers'.³¹ Disguise, as used here, has a patent political dimension, functioning as a screen for underlying divisions in Spanish society. Critically, the bourgeoisie put on the mask of the unadulterated workers, concealing the control they strive to retain. The bourgeoisie does not take refuge in shelters, but conserves its power in hidden lairs.

The political aspect of this disguise receives a fuller treatment in the second part of the essay, where Orwell analyses the methods and impact of what he considers 'Communist anti-revolutionary propaganda'.³² Words are central here, none more so than the word 'Trotskyist', a Communist synonym, Orwell argues, for traitor: 'in Spain at the moment you can be thrown in jail and kept there indefinitely, without trial, on the mere rumour that you are a Trotskyist'.³³ Lobbing himself a rhetorical full-toss, Orwell asks, 'what is a Trotskyist?', smashing this to the rhetorical boundary with the answer that

The word 'Trotskyist' (or 'Trotsky-Fascist') is generally used to mean a disguised Fascist who poses as an ultra-revolutionary in order to split the left-wing forces.³⁴

This definition brings together two elements already noted, those of a monstrous hybrid ('Trotsky-Fascist') and of disguise. As with the earlier examples, clumsily fused elements are deemed destructive.

The fact that the use of the Trotskyist label in a pejorative way comes not from Orwell, but from what he considers Communist propaganda, distinguishes it sharply from the earlier examples. Orwell's two-headed pigs and grotesque spectacles only operate within the confines of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', but the Trotskyist stigma discredits the bearer in the political world beyond.

Its particular potency derives from its plausibility, Orwell noting that

[t]he accusation is a very subtle one, because in any given case, unless one happened to know the contrary, it might be true. A Fascist spy probably *would* disguise himself as a revolutionary.³⁵

The duplicity exposed in Orwell's rendering of the Spanish Civil War suggests the difficulties in gaining a true picture of the conflict, were it not for the fact that, against the subtle power of false accusations, one might 'know the contrary'. The honest doubter might still triumph.

While visual distortions are considered in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', the manipulation of words constitutes the focus of Orwell's criticism; the reports of abuses meted out to 'hecatombs of nuns' are verbal rather than visual, after all. The proper definition of words, therefore, lies at the heart of the essay's strategy. As with the physical images, verbal disguises must be torn aside, bizarre combinations must be recognised and exposed. A clear representation of the situation in Spain can only be achieved, in other words, with a language cleansed of falsehoods.

This price of this cleansing requires the overturning of left-wing precepts, not least of which the belief that the Left inherently strives for revolutionary change. The Spanish Republican Government, Orwell argues, in fact fears revolution more than Franco's Fascists. In this inverted world

the point to notice is that the people who are in jail now are not Fascists but revolutionaries: they are there not because their opinions are too much to the Right, but because they are too much to the Left. And the people responsible for putting them there are those dreadful revolutionaries at whose very name Garvin quakes in his galoshes – the Communists.³⁶

The invocation of J.L.Garvin, the right-wing editor of *The Observer*, upsets the supposed polarities between political groups. Additionally, and more importantly, Orwell establishes an association between Garvin's overt anti-revolutionary position and the covertly anti-revolutionary activities of Communists in Spain. The use of Garvin correlates with the earlier employment of Rothermere's *Daily Mail* to focus attention upon the misrepresentations of the left-wing. For, like the *Daily Mail*, the explicit conservatism of Garvin consciously advertises

itself, can therefore be recognised, and subsequently can be ignored. The 'far subtler' distortions of the Communists, by contrast, conceal themselves behind the mask of blanket political terms such as Left and Right, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary. 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' marks Orwell's attempt to unmask the reality behind the disguises.

Orwell argues that 'the real struggle [in Spain] is between revolution and counter-revolution'. Not, as the misinformed outsider might assume, a struggle between Franco and a broad anti-Fascist Socialist coalition, but one

between the workers who are vainly trying to hold on to a little of what they won in 1936, and the Liberal-Communist bloc who are so successfully taking it away from them. It is unfortunate that so few people in England have yet caught up with the fact . . . that Communists everywhere are in alliance with bourgeois reformism and using the whole of their powerful machinery to crush or discredit any party that shows signs of revolutionary tendencies.³⁷

Once again, he depicts a destructive and mongrel compound, this time of anti-revolutionary Communists and Liberals ranged against the elemental revolutionary desires of 'the workers'. Yet these 'facts', at least as interpreted by Orwell, lay hidden from an ill-informed English public unable to escape political orthodoxies.

'Spilling the Spanish Beans' ends with a damning salvo at what Orwell considers the conscious distortion of the truth about conditions in Spain by the left-wing British press. He contends that

[t]his is no accident. There has been a quite deliberate conspiracy (I could give detailed instances) to prevent the Spanish situation from being understood. People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the grounds that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda.³⁸

Orwell exposes what he sees as a fundamental antagonism between a perceptible 'truth' and the manipulation of that truth to suit ideological considerations. As elsewhere, the generic conventions of the essay allow such assertions to be made without substantiation, the promise of 'detailed instances' standing in for evidence that would receive fuller treatment in *Homage To Catalonia*. As he did in his essays on imperialism, Orwell intertwines the political with the moral, arguing that if the

distortion continues 'it is easy to see where such cowardice leads'. The consequence of the considered misreporting, Orwell complains, will be the missing of

an opportunity of learning what Fascism is and how it can be combated . . . And thus we are one step nearer to the great war 'against Fascism' . . . which will allow Fascism, British variety, to be slipped over our necks during the first week.³⁹

Orwell was not the first to fear British-flavoured Fascism. Ralph Fox had used the term 'English Fascism' as far back as his 1933 study of British imperialism.⁴⁰ Where Orwell deviates from Fox is in charging the left-wing press with at least some of the responsibility, should such a variant emerge. He was not alone in these thoughts: an editorial in the small independent periodical, *Controversy*, put the case for the 'Censorship of the Left' a month before the appearance of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans'. Arguing that '[f]ormerly, censorship and suppression came largely from the State and always from the Right', *Controversy* editor C.A. Smith contends that 'to-day a most effective censorship comes from agencies other than the State, and these agencies include several organs of the Left'.⁴¹

This allegation marks a clear division between Smith and Orwell on the one hand, and those like Fenby and Martin who argue for more persuasive propaganda on Spain. Orwell holds the view that, beyond the smoke of battle, some palpable reality can and must be discovered and delineated. The Fenbys, Martins and Gollanczs, by contrast, use that same metaphorical smoke to stealthily marshal and redeploy their forces. Though none would view this terms of a public sphere, the debate over the propriety of propaganda can be illuminated by considering Habermas's argument, that in an ideal public sphere individuals can 'confer with unrestricted freedom . . . to express and publish their opinions'. Orwell in essence challenges the Left press to allow such freedom.

Controversy

Between the publication of the two parts of 'Spilling The Spanish Beans', 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' appeared in the marginal periodical, *Controversy*. As already noted, Orwell proposal for the essay was first accepted

and then rejected by *New Statesman and Nation* editor Kingsley Martin as 'violent anti-Negrin propaganda'. Michael Shelden considers Martin's rejection unimportant, remarking that

[a]t this stage of his career, Orwell could always find someone willing to publish his articles and reviews, so Kingsley Martin's rejections were only only temporary setbacks.⁴²

Shelden completely misreads the importance of publishing an essay in *The New Statesman and Nation* as against *Controversy*. John Strachey's assessment of *The New Statesman and Nation* in the rival periodical *Left Review* gives some sense of its importance. Strachey writes that

directly, or indirectly, [*The New Statesman and Nation*] does the thinking for all that section of the lower and middle middle class which thinks at all . . .

[T]he general line of policy enunciated by the *New Statesman and Nation* is of importance.⁴³

Despite Strachey's facetiousness, his general point holds true. In 1937, the periodical had a weekly audience of nearly 25,000 and a prominent national profile which projected beyond restrictive left-wing boundaries.

In sharp contrast, *Controversy* was a struggling and marginal monthly journal, which drew upon a small, heavily politicised audience. Established in October 1936, *Controversy* styled itself 'The Monthly Forum For Socialist Discussion'. The first number was headed by an editorial titled 'Through Discussion to Unity', which proclaims that *Controversy* has 'been established to meet the most urgent need of Left journalism in Britain – a genuine Left Socialist Forum'.⁴⁴ Clearly, the call for a 'genuine' forum castigates existing periodicals, yet the editorial is unapologetic. It is argued that 'the Left is cursed by a variety of fake forums [sic] which are merely the disguised propaganda organs of some one Party'.⁴⁵ To counteract these biases, *Controversy* promises to print opposing views on topics in the same issue, and hopes to attract reader replies to provocative articles.

The journal proved true to its word, publishing arguments from a broad spectrum of the British Left. As an indication, just a month after the publication of 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', Orwell himself was used to advertise *Controversy*'s eclectic contributions. Answering charges of

sectarianism, the journal responds that 'a magazine whose contributors include personalities as diverse as . . . James Maxton . . . C.E.M. Joad . . . George Orwell, and the late Ralph Fox, surely avoids both narrowness and dulness [sic]'.⁴⁶ A signed statement to mark the second anniversary of *Controversy* reinforces a sense of the periodical's catholic selection, the signatories noting that

No one of us is in agreement with all that has appeared in its columns. That is inevitable, since both its contributors and we ourselves hold varying and often conflicting views. But in this magazine each of these views has found repeated expression – by members of the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and Communist Party, by Anarchists, Trotskyists and Pacifists. Its disappearance would be a loss to Left journalism.⁴⁷

Amongst the signatories were Aneurin Bevan, James Maxton, Naomi Mitchison, Fenner Brockway and George Orwell. Like many marginal journals, survival for *Controversy* depended on an endless round of circulation drives and direct appeals for cash donations. Costs had to be kept low in order to attract working class audiences; *Controversy* cost 3p. Even maintaining the semblance of a public sphere amongst the Left rested precariously on attracting the allegiance of small groups of people.

Orwell kept up a sporadic association with *Controversy*, contributing 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' in 1937 and signing the appeal to save *Controversy* in 1938. His essay, 'Democracy in the British Army', was published in the periodical 1939, by which time *Controversy* had changed its name to *Left Forum*.⁴⁸ By 1941 that name had been shortened to the rather self-effacing *Left*, for the November number Orwell completed a questionnaire printed under the title 'Socialists Answer Our Questions On The War'.⁴⁹ This quizzed the likes of Fenner Brockway, H.N. Brailsford, Herbert Read, Ethel Mannin and Orwell on, for example, whether Socialists should defend the British war effort, or whether it might 'be possible to avoid the dominance of either Imperialism or Stalinism at the end of the war?' Orwell's answer to both questions was 'Yes'.

The inclusion of a variety of political positions did not inoculate *Controversy* against all biases. The second anniversary issue carries an analysis of the previous numbers which reveals that more articles were published from members of the I.L.P. than from the larger Communist Party, or the (comparatively) huge Labour Party.⁵⁰ While Michael

Shelden's loose description of *Controversy* as 'the I.L.P. monthly' misrepresents the periodical, the links between the two cannot be ignored in the analysis of 'Eye-witness in Barcelona'.⁵¹ Orwell had fought in the I.L.P. contingent in Spain, even being mentioned in dispatches published in the party organ, *New Leader*.⁵² More directly, an advertisement in an August 1937 issue of the *New Leader* insists that '[e]veryone should read George Orwell's remarkable article 'Eye-witness in Spain'[sic] in the current *Controversy*'.⁵³

'Eye-witness in Barcelona'

The eye-witness perspective made explicit in the title reinvokes the potential opposition between appearance and reality which informed 'Spilling the Spanish Beans'. Yet, where in that essay different constructions of 'reality' competed for dominance, in 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' Orwell changes tack, arguing that a sound basis of fact has already been established: 'the major events have been carefully tabulated in Fenner Brockway's pamphlet "The Truth About Barcelona", which so far as my knowledge goes is entirely accurate'.⁵⁴ Brockway's record allows Orwell to concentrate on his own task, 'in my capacity as eye-witness . . . to add a few footnotes on several of the most-disputed points'. This rhetorical method works by a neat circularity. As an eye-witness, Orwell verifies Brockway's 'entirely accurate' account, while simultaneously using that account as the foundation for his own assessments.

In accepting Brockway's account, however, Orwell takes up a provocative political stance. Brockway and others in the I.L.P. had long been embroiled in a furious verbal row with the Communist Party, carried out through their respective party newspapers, the *New Leader* and the *Daily Worker*. Mutual antagonism had preceded the war in Spain: an article in the April 1934 *New Leader* claims, 'Communists Take Wrong Turning'.⁵⁵ By December 1935 the war of words had escalated, the *New Leader* publishing an 'Open Letter' to Communist Party leader Harry Pollitt asking 'Where Does the Communist Party Stand?'.⁵⁶ A reply to another 'open letter' drew the haughty response from Fenner Brockway that '[n]o letter could reveal more clearly the mental confusion and blind faith of the typical loyal member of the Communist Party'.⁵⁷ John McGovern kept up the tide of abuse in 'Socialism Without Compromise'. Counterpunching against Communist attacks, McGovern argues that

In the 'Daily Worker,' J.R.Campbell is asking, "Where Does the I.L.P. Stand?" I will tell him; but first it is worth asking where the Communist Party stands?⁵⁸

Though hardly a debating *coup de grâce*, McGovern's question does register the degree of animosity between the parties.

The existing debate over ideological purity provided the kindling for disputes over the war in Spain, as the respective parties lined up with their Spanish counterparts. The degree of I.L.P. identification was high, a June 1936 article declaring that 'the Workers Party of Marxist Unity [P.O.U.M.] is the I.L.P. of Spain'.⁵⁹ This association continued through the war, Fenner Brockway contending a year later that

Sincere revolutionary Socialists will increasingly turn to the Parties in each country which carry on the revolutionary tradition. In Spain that Party is the P.O.U.M. In this country that Party is the I.L.P.⁶⁰

These were the groups Orwell fought for inside Spain; he was to argue their cause in Britain.

While the commitment of the I.L.P. to P.O.U.M. remained steadfast, it generated opprobrium from some quarters in sections Britain, requiring repeated refutation in the *New Leader*. An 'Eye-witness Story by an ILPer in Madrid' in January 1937, for example, howls 'How's This "Daily Mail?"', in rejecting anti-P.O.U.M. claims.⁶¹ In February 1937, an article considers 'Why Communists Attack POUM'; two weeks later the paper announces defiantly, 'We Are Proud of POUM'.⁶² Yet, a column in *Time and Tide* registers the dark colours in which the Anarchists and P.O.U.M. were being portrayed, charging that they have

let the winning of the of the war fall a very secondary place
[their] ranks have become the happy hunting ground for the agents
of General Franco.⁶³

With a fine irony, Orwell had been shot through the throat two days before the article appeared. 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' attempts to repair the political damage caused both to P.O.U.M. and the I.L.P. by reports in the British press.

The essay covers similar territory to that of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', and in several instances almost the same words are employed: the 'government is manifestly more afraid of the revolution than of the

Fascists'; the war 'will almost certainly end' in compromise; 'the present Government has more points of resemblance to Fascism than points of difference'. Yet 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' has a sharper focus, primarily considering events surrounding the May 1937 uprising in Barcelona, and the Communist's subsequent suppression of dissent. This concentration allows (if not necessitates) a first-hand account.

Despite its title, however, the essay is not exclusively an eye-witness report. 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' comprises two parts: the first, an account of events surrounding the May uprising in Barcelona that Orwell himself had witnessed; the second, a more general analysis of the suppression of the P.O.U.M. and the lessons to be drawn from this. In the first part Orwell challenges perceptions of three aspects of the uprising written up in the *Daily Worker* and the *New Statesman and Nation*: the purpose of the uprising; the people involved; arms supposedly hidden by the P.O.U.M.

The individual rebuttals Orwell puts forward are less important here than the tactic he employs in each case. In the first instance, the Communist press's insistence that the uprising was designed to overthrow the Government and perhaps hand over Catalonia to the Fascists, Orwell counters

I cannot . . . say with certainty that a definite revolutionary intention was not in the minds of a few extremists . . . What I can say is that the ordinary rank and file behind the barricades never for an instant thought of themselves as taking part in a revolution. We thought, all of us, that we were simply defending ourselves.⁶⁴

The rhetorical strategy takes account of the fact that, as in a piece of narrative fiction told in the first person, the eye-witness perspective has inherent limitations; the intention of all the participants cannot be known. Yet these uncertainties are dismissed in favour of the only certainties available, those of the eye-witness. Later in this section, proof of the fact that the P.O.U.M. and its supporters were ordered not to shoot again comes from the narrator, but this time from his actions: 'I personally was fired at a number of times, but never fired back'.⁶⁵

Yet the true index of the authority of the eye-witness comes in the ability not simply to describe but in fact to analyse the overall situation. In answer to the self-generated question of

[w]hether the revolutionary opportunity *ought* to have been taken advantage of . . . [s]peaking solely for myself, I should answer 'No.' . . . I still think it was a little better, though only a very little, to lose the revolution than to lose the war.⁶⁶

With this statement Orwell leaps from merely recording the facts of the uprising to interpreting them. The false modesty at the beginning of the essay, the professed wish only to 'add a few footnotes' to Brockway's 'entirely accurate' account, provides a rhetorical springboard for the act of providing the explanation for events, one in this instance at odds with that of the Communist press. The perspective employed in 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' is anything but neutral; it has an inherent, and important, political dimension.

The same argument applies in Orwell's rebuttal of the other two claims, about the people involved and supposed hidden caches of arms. A few examples should suffice. Contesting the claim, again made in the Communist press, that the uprising was solely the work of P.O.U.M., Orwell counters that '[a]nyone who was in Barcelona at the time knows that this is an absurdity'.⁶⁷ Denying a charge that the P.O.U.M. secretly stockpiled arms, (a charge 'repeated so often that even a normally critical observer like H.N.Brailsford accepts it') Orwell argues that '[a]s a matter of fact the P.O.U.M. possessed pitifully few weapons . . . During the street-fighting I was at all three of the principal strongholds of the P.O.U.M.'. ⁶⁸ He then catalogues the party's meagre arms. The eye-witness perspective allows not only the dismantling of other interpretations, but also their replacement by observed 'facts'.

The full effect of the rhetorical momentum built up in the first half of the essay can be best seen in the second, which defends the P.O.U.M. against charges that its leaders are in the pay of the Fascists, and uncovers how the suppression of the P.O.U.M. was concealed from the troops at the Front. The first of these tasks proves problematic, chiefly for the reason that Orwell did not witness the key episodes which might substantiate his counterclaim. For instance, while the arrest of P.O.U.M. leader Andres Nin may be known, Nin's fate remains unclear, Orwell writing that

[a]s early as June 19 [1937] the news reached Barcelona, via Valencia, that Nin had been shot. This report, we hope, was untrue, but it hardly needs pointing out that the Valencia Government will be obliged to shoot a number, perhaps a

dozen of the P.O.U.M. leaders if it expects its charges to be taken seriously.⁶⁹

Here, the lack of facts, garnered either from first-hand knowledge or the accounts of others, denies Orwell anything more than wishful speculation.

Denied the foundation of either first-hand knowledge or corroborating evidence to counter the central charges against the P.O.U.M. leadership, the second half of the essay stitches together hints and suppositions in patchwork fashion. For example, while certain that many connected with the P.O.U.M. were arbitrarily jailed, Orwell admits that

probably it would be impossible to get hold of accurate figures, but there is reason to think that during the first week there were 400 arrests in Barcelona alone; certainly the jails were so full that large numbers of prisoners had to be confined in shops and other temporary dumps.⁷⁰

While in the first part of the essay, the uncertainty of the motives of all involved in the uprising could be overruled by the narrator's certainty of his own motives, in the second part, the 'certainty' over the numbers arrested depends on guessing totals from fragments of information gathered first-hand.

On the question of the concealment news on the P.O.U.M. Orwell stands on firmer ground, for in leaving the front to see a medical board '[t]ogether with a number of others I had the disagreeable experience of getting back to Barcelona to find that the P.O.U.M. had been suppressed in my absence'.⁷¹ On such *luck* do eye-witness accounts rely, and in fact as the result of a timely warning Orwell was able to escape imprisonment, though 'other [sic] were not so fortunate'. The essay ends with Orwell once again using his first-hand knowledge to interpret the complexities of the situation in Spain, much of which he himself had not seen. Arguing that the loyalty of the militia would not have been affected had they known of the suppression of the P.O.U.M. Orwell considers that 'still, they had a right to know'.⁷² He uses the specific situation in which he was involved, however, to draw two much larger conclusions, which with the essay itself ends:

[P.O.U.M.'s] suppression is symptomatically important . . . [clearly] the present Government has more points of resemblance to Fascism than points of difference . . . Secondly, the elimination of

the P.O.U.M. gives warning of the impending attack upon the Anarchists.⁷³

Orwell was correct on the second prediction, but his view of the correlations between the Government and the Fascists was merely a contentious interpretation. The importance of his analysis, however, lies in his founding a position on the supposed bedrock of first-hand knowledge.

This marks one of several contrasts between 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' and 'Spilling the Spanish Beans'. In the former essay, Orwell rejects the confrontationism of the latter for a more measured argument. In 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' the distorted accounts of others, which provide the target in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' are largely ignored in favour of Orwell's first-hand report. In a sense, he cuts out the middle-men, plying his description direct to the British readers.

Yet, a central and dramatic difference in the two essays concerns the question of revolution in Spain. In 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', the crucial opposition lay in that between the counter-revolutionary Government and the revolutionary workers. In that essay Orwell clearly champions the radical aspirations of the workers, while downplaying the threat of the Fascists. In 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', by contrast, he adopts a more cautious stance, for though still supporting the workers' 'May Day' uprising in Barcelona, and defending their right to protect themselves, he argues that such actions 'might well have meant losing the war against Franco'. Orwell then speculates: 'It may be . . . that the revolution was finally lost in those few days in May. But I still think it was a little better, though only a very little, to lose the revolution than lose the war'.⁷⁴ The thrust of this view puts it at odds with that set out in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans'.

How can the different arguments be accounted for? A letter by Orwell suggests an explanation. Commenting to Frank Jellinek on *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell writes that

I've given a more sympathetic account of the POUM 'line' than I actually felt . . . I had to put it as sympathetically as possible, because it had no hearing in the capitalist press and nothing but libels in the left-wing press.⁷⁵

Orwell was not averse to a little distortion in a good cause, nor was he ignorant of the potential impact of his views on different

audiences and editors. Though 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' might prove unacceptable to Kingsley Martin, and therefore be denied an airing in the *New Statesman and Nation*, Philip Mairet of the *New English Weekly* considered it an 'illuminating article'.⁷⁶ Orwell, remember, had planned to give the *New Statesman and Nation* 'a nasty jar' with *Homage To Catalonia*. 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' provides a warning tremor of what is to come. Though the circulation of the *New English Weekly* did not approach that of the *New Statesman and Nation*, it still allowed the opportunity of quickly placing 'a more sympathetic account of the POUM "line"' before a politically interested section of the public. As has been shown, such accounts were in short supply in the middle of the Spanish Civil War. Given the rejection of *The New Statesman and Nation*, the *New English Weekly* provided Orwell's best means of publicising an unpopular view.

The smaller, more radical audience of *Controversy*, by contrast, could be given a more considered argument. While still emphasising the points of congruence between the Government and the Fascists, and the biases of the Communist press, 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' presents a more measured assessment of the failure of revolution in Spain. At the same time, the essay performs the valuable function of warning the Anarchist-supporting readers of *Controversy* of the dangers ahead. Such a warning would have found few to heed it in the *New English Weekly*.

Orwell's tactical use of certain arguments for certain periodical audiences can be recognised in the fact that neither essay seems entirely appropriate for the journal in which it appears. The general argument in 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' fits more easily with the politically moderate leanings of the *New English Weekly* than the more radical *Controversy*. Similarly, the relatively measured assessment in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' would have found a more sympathetic audience in *Controversy*. As they stand, however, Orwell gets the opportunity of questioning, rather than reinforcing, the preconceptions of both sets of readers.

Reviews

As noted earlier, Orwell also uses reviews of books on Spain to promote his own reading of the situation. These were to appear in *Time and Tide*, the *New English Weekly* and the *New Leader* in late 1937 and 1938. Each review allows Orwell the opportunity to reiterate views expressed in his essays, and to a potentially wider audience than those of the *New English*

Weekly and *Controversy*. Naturally, too much should not be made of the impact of these reviews; what significance they have is in showing Orwell grasping every opportunity to publicise his interpretation of the war.

A few examples are sufficient to prove this general point. The October 1937 *Time and Tide* review of Mary Low's and Juan Brea's *Red Spanish Notebook* recycles the argument that while 'revolutionary events had taken place . . . there has been no fundamental change in the structure of government'.⁷⁷ Orwell praises the book as a 'badly needed' statement of the P.O.U.M. case, obliquely castigating *Time and Tide* for its own treatment of the P.O.U.M. only months earlier. In a July 1938 *New Leader* review, Orwell judges Frank Jellinek's *The Civil War in Spain* 'the best book on the Spanish war from a Communist angle', but still attacks Jellinek's Communist, or 'Communist partisan' interpretation of events in Barcelona. Jellinek had also been in the city in May 1937; not surprisingly, Orwell invokes his experience, writing that 'this gave me a measure of checking his accuracy'.⁷⁸ The middle section of the review contains a shortened version of the P.O.U.M.-friendly analysis Orwell had set out in 'Eye-witness in Barcelona'.

Orwell's review of *The Spanish Cockpit* by Franz Borkenau was rejected by Kingsley Martin; therefore, it deserves attention. The review actually considers two books, but Orwell writes off *Volunteer in Spain*, by International Brigade Member John Sommerfield, as 'sentimental tripe'.⁷⁹ *The Spanish Cockpit*, on the other hand, receives high praise. Orwell had been back in England barely a month, and *Homage to Catalonia* was in embryonic form; little wonder then that Orwell applauds a book which sets out much of his own case. He writes with mock circumspection that

[p]erhaps I am rash in saying that it is the best book yet written on the subject, but I believe that anyone who has recently come from Spain will agree with me.⁸⁰

Once again, Orwell uses his Spanish experience as a means of checking the accuracy of Borkenau's account, allowing it to pass muster. Yet he also employs the authority of the eye-witness to argue that others who had been in Spain would agree with Orwell's assessment of Borkenau's book. Orwell would have known that such a belief was only so much air. This perhaps explains his later admission to Raymond Mortimer, the literary editor of *The New Statesman and Nation*, that 'the [rejected] review I wrote was tendentious and perhaps unfair'.⁸¹

Homage To Catalonia: An Aside

Though *Homage To Catalonia* properly belongs outside a study of Orwell's essays, the book warrants an aside because of its relation to those essays. 'Orwell's study . . . is the work of a partisan; he served with the P.O.U.M. militia' wrote *Controversy's* 'Historicus', soon after *Homage To Catalonia* was published.⁸² Ironically, the book, along with Jellinek's *Civil War in Spain*, were the July 1938 'Books of the Month' in the periodical. 'Historicus' comes to praise rather than bury Orwell's partisanship, regarding his

account of the streetfighting . . . [as] so detailed, so scrupulously limited to what the author saw himself . . . that it must, I believe, carry absolute conviction to every impartial reader.⁸³

Given the book's miserable initial sales, the ranks of impartial readers were either desperately thin in numbers, or poor in purse.

Yet the importance of the review lies less in the praise it lavishes than the fact that an early review of the book appears fourteen months after the events described took place. Orwell acknowledges the problem in the book itself, noting that 'because the necessary records do not exist . . . [f]uture historians will have nothing to go on except a mass of accusations and party propaganda'.⁸⁴ By the time *Homage To Catalonia* was published, the book in more ways than one was already history.

'Caesarean Section in Spain'

'Spilling the Spanish Beans', 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' and *Homage To Catalonia* were all written while Orwell could only guess at the outcome of the conflict. By 1939, however, when he wrote 'Caesarean Section in Spain', Franco was in the ascendent. The confidence in victory which in 1937 and 1938 had sustained such periodicals as *New Leader* and the *Daily Worker* (and which gave them the impetus to compete over the future of a Socialist Spain) had been replaced in 1939 by the prospect of the previously unthinkable: defeat. Even so, the speed of the Fascist advance can be gauged by the explanation in the introduction to the essay, that 'it was written before Catalonia collapsed'.⁸⁵ Unlike his earlier writings, however, 'Caesarean Section in Spain' concentrates

not on the specifics of the war, but on the role of Spanish workers in defending democracy. This approach seems wholly appropriate given that the essay was published in March 1939 number of *The Highway*, the periodical of the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.).

'Caeserean Section in Spain' has been forgotten in analyses of Orwell's Spanish essays. As with 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', part of the explanation of this neglect lies in the obscurity of the journal in which the essay first appeared. The reason for its exclusion from *CEJL*, however, remains unclear. The editors knew of *The Highway*, for they include a brief sketch in a footnote to a letter Orwell wrote to Richard Rees in 1949. In the letter, Orwell thanks Rees for sending a copy of the journal. The footnote also acknowledges *The Highway* as the 'organ of the W.E.A.', but makes no mention of Orwell's 1939 contribution.⁸⁶

Priced 2p, *The Highway* was a monthly periodical with a circulation in excess of 20,000, larger than most independent journals of the Left. Despite this, a message of thanks from the General Secretary of the W.E.A. in April 1939 underlines the economic difficulties faced by these periodicals. He writes that 'if we can increase the circulation to 30,000 we can produce without financial loss'.⁸⁷ As a measure of the task, *The New Statesman and Nation* sold only slightly more than 25,000 copies (per week, admittedly) in the same period.⁸⁸

Several aspects distinguish this from Orwell's other essays on Spain. Though he does utilise perceptions drawn from his experience in Spain, the bulk of the essay surveys more general issues, most notably the effect the war might have on the development of Spanish democracy. This attention to broader questions rests on the smoothing over of the divisions within the Spanish Left. Though these are mentioned briefly, the central conflict portrayed in 'Caesarean Section in Spain' lies between Franco and the Republican Government, the latter being portrayed as the defender of liberal, democratic aspirations. In painting this picture of an essentially harmonious Left, Orwell tactfully leaves out the attacks on the distortions of Communists and the British press which had informed his earlier essays.

'Caeserean Section in Spain' instead incorporates a vote of confidence in the Spanish people's ability to resist Franco (should he succeed) Orwell considering that

[t]he people have seen and learned too much . . . The desire for liberty, for knowledge, and for a decent standard of living has spread too far too widely to be killed by obscurantism or persecution. If that

is so, the slaughter and suffering which accompany a modern civil war may not have been altogether wasted.⁸⁹

The trust in the basic idealism of the Spanish workers carries the echo of Orwell's earlier essays, but the qualifications in the final sentence undercut a sense of total confidence in a positive outcome. Throughout 'Caesarean Section in Spain' Orwell mixes the plucky, the sombre, the hopeful and the realistic, in clear distinction from the stridency of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' and 'Eye-witness in Barcelona'.

A major part of the difference between this and the earlier essays lies in the downturn in the fortunes of the anti-Franco forces by 1939. Yet, in part, the reason lies in a factor already recognised in the contributions to the *New English Weekly* and *Controversy*: the periodical's readership. The Workers' Education Association set itself a didactic brief, and in his essay for *The Highway* Orwell blends an account of the situation in Spain with a lesson on the importance of workers in the struggle for democracy.

The brief sketch of the post-1931 history of Spain with which the essay begins ends with the statement that 'in the existing [early 1930s] state of Spain it was not possible to move nearer to a real democracy without colliding with powerful vested interests'.⁹⁰ This rather simplistic reading of the cause of Franco's uprising gives way to the more general assessment that

the mere appearance of the Popular Front Government was enough to raise the most difficult problem of our time: the problem of making fundamental changes by democratic methods.⁹¹

Whether this did constitute the most difficult question of the time could be debated endlessly; certainly in early 1939 other problems strove for supremacy. Orwell raises the ante by suggesting a more general point, that

[o]ne only has to consider the possibilities of modern war, the kind of things governments will have to do to hold peoples together, to feel very doubtful whether there will be much democracy left anywhere after several years of 'all-in' warfare between great nations.⁹²

The global threat to democracy pessimistically delineated, Orwell pulls his rhetorical rabbit from the hat, revealing that in fact the Spanish Civil

War operates as a 'hopeful portent', for 'in Government Spain both the forms and the spirit of democracy have survived to an extent that no one could have foreseen'.⁹³ By the time the essay had been published 'Government Spain' had ceased to exist in any meaningful form, yet Orwell's tactic remains plain enough: to publish a defence of the Spanish workers while using their struggle as a 'hopeful portent' for the future of democracy. The W.E.A. audience for the essay explains this strategy. In employing the democratic aspirations and successes of the Spanish workers (at least at the time the essay was written) he suggests to the readers of *The Highway* their potential strength. 'Caesarean Section in Spain' works, then, as a general examination of the resilience of democracy. It functions partly as an analysis of the Spanish Civil War, but potently as an assertion of the democratic potential of British workers.

Orwell's essays on Spain need to be considered as more than simply variations on a single theme. The failure to do so negates the benefits gained from analysing each essay in terms of a specific debate. For, while the Spanish Civil War and Orwell's small supporting role in it play a part in the arguments in each, the individual essays demonstrate the distinct ways Orwell uses the medium to examine a variety of concerns, whether they be the truth of the reporting of the war, events in Barcelona in May 1937, or the effect of the war on democracy in general.

The variety of approach and tone reinforce the sense of the essay form's elasticity. Yet, recognising that 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' attempts to illuminate the dark corners of British Left press coverage of the Spanish Civil War counts for more than the simple evaluation of generic conventions. In fact, the generic and political elements work together, the lack of substantiation allowed in the essay enabling Orwell to prosecute vigorously his case against what he sees as the distortions of the British left-wing press with a vigour difficult to sustain in a longer argument. The same case can be made for 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', where the need to record Orwell's own version of events in Barcelona in May 1937 override a considered view of alternative interpretations. The essay in this sense functions as a weapon of guerilla warfare, enabling the essayist to make a brief (but telling) attack on the arguments of the enemy.

The essay also allows the adoption of roles other than that of the rhetorical guerilla. While in each case Orwell's own involvement in the war informs the essay's argument, a close examination shows Orwell

using his first-hand knowledge in several ways. The perspective taken in 'Eye-witness in Barcelona' seems necessary to the purpose of starkly recording the 'facts', but the analysis of that essay shows the limitations of the stance, most obviously in the gaps in Orwell's information. Nevertheless, the vividness of Orwell's portrait of events bridges those gaps, without weakening the essay's polemicism.

'Spilling the Spanish Beans', though it partly employs the perspective of the eye-witness, critically includes the analysis of newspaper accounts and the interpretation of Communist propaganda. The persona taken up here is that of the honest doubter. While pulling back from the eye-witness perspective allows a greater scope for interpretation, the authority for the analysis comes from the fact that Orwell actually saw what he later described.

In 'Caesarean in Spain', the lesson on democracy leans only lightly on Orwell's Spanish experiences, but the tactic allows Orwell to play the commentator on the general threat to democracy. By translating the events of the Spanish conflict into the language of worker resistance, Orwell can be seen targetting his argument to the specific audience afforded him through the pages of *The Highway*. As such, he follows the approach taken in the earlier essays, utilising the variety of available periodicals to publicise his analyses of a complex, changing war.

The changing debates on the Spanish Civil War suggest the role participants played in facilitating or restricting argument. The examination of Orwell's essays on Spain in terms of a broader public debate reveals several things, most obviously that the topic was the subject of intense and often bitter debate in the years immediately after 1936. Yet the recognition of this goes only part of the way, for the case of Orwell exemplifies the way in which access to the organs of public debate could be denied by those in control of the newspapers and periodicals of the Left. This analysis should not fall into simplistic labelling, whereby the Kingsley Martins and Victor Gollanczs play manipulative villains to Orwell's battling hero. For, though both Martin and Gollancz might overplay the custodial roles they took upon themselves, *The New Statesman and Nation* and the Left Book Club did publicise ideas at odds with general orthodoxies on the war.

Probably none of this would have satisfied Orwell, and in fact would not satisfy the conditions set down by Habermas for an ideal bourgeois public sphere. The freedom to debate and then freely to transmit the results of that debate were constrained, even in the left-wing subset of the public sphere Orwell inhabited. Habermas might perhaps be more

forgiving than Orwell, his model merely allowing an overview of public debate, whereas Orwell was operating in the actual world of political argument. Comparing the ideal with the reality of the debate on Spain in Britain suggests that the restrictions placed on the publication of views channeled the consequent debate away from the position Orwell championed.

Orwell's views were able to be read, though only by the few who subscribed to the *New English Weekly*, *Controversy* and *The Highway*. The *New Statesman* and *Nation*'s rejection of Orwell's interpretation of the war clearly denied him access to the Left's largest politically sophisticated periodical, though it must be remembered that in 1937 Orwell was a relatively marginal figure. Certainly, however, his unpopular views did little to bring him within the fold. Which does not mean that his views were considered valueless: in recalling his rejection of 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', Kingsley Martin makes the comment that 'we didn't have *Homage To Catalonia* to publish – nothing balanced like that'.⁹⁴ Martin appears not to recognise the irony.

Notes

- 1 Editorial, *Left News* (January 1938), 636–7 (p. 636).
- 2 Charles Fenby, 'British Public Opinion on Spain', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. VIII Nos. 1–4, 1937, 248–58 (p. 258).
- 3 John McNair, 'Night Attack on the Aragon Front', *New Leader*, 30 April 1937, p. 3.
- 4 Kingsley Martin, 'Spain and British Public Opinion', *The Political Quarterly*, vol. VII Nos. 1–4, 1936, 573–87 (p. 574).
- 5 Kingsley Martin, 1965 interview with Malcolm Muggeridge, cited in C.R. Rolph, *Kingsley: The Life, Letters and Diaries of Kingsley Martin* (London, 1968), p. 228.
- 6 Martin, in Rolph, p. 228.
- 7 George Orwell, 'Caeserean Section in Spain', *The Highway*, (March 1939), pp. 145–7. George Orwell, 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', *Controversy*, Vol. 1 No. 11 (August 1937), pp. 85–8.
- 8 Martin, 'Public Opinion', p. 576.
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- 49 'Socialists Answer Our Questions on War', *Left*, (November 1941), pp. 241-6.
- 50 Number of articles published in Nos.1-24 of *Controversy*, by party allegiance: Labour Party members (34 articles published); Communist Party of Great Britain (22); I.L.P. (47); no party affiliation (41); all others (52). Figures in *Controversy*, (October 1938).
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- 53 Advertisement in *New Leader*, 20 August 1937, p. 5.
- 54 Orwell, 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', p. 85.
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- 86 George Orwell, letter to Richard Rees, 18 March 1949. *CEJL IV*, 484–5 (p. 485).
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Truncheons and Castor Oil: Totalitarianism

Even the Fascist bully at his symbolic worst, with rubber truncheon in one hand and castor-oil bottle in the other, does not necessarily feel himself a bully; more probably he feels like Roland in the pass at Roncevaux, defending Christendom against the barbarian.

George Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, 1937.¹

Rubber truncheons and castor oil have scared people of the most diverse kinds into forgetting that Fascism and capitalism are at bottom the same thing.

George Orwell, review of *Workers' Front*, *New English Weekly*,
17 February 1938.²

I have to struggle against [the end of free speech], just as I have to struggle against castor oil, rubber truncheons and concentration camps.

George Orwell, 'Why I Join the ILP', *New Leader*, June 1938.³

How many people personally known to you have been beaten with rubber truncheons or forced to swallow pints of castor oil.

George Orwell, 'Fascism and Democracy', *Left News*,
February 1941.⁴

Orwell's repeated use of truncheons and castor oil as a short-hand for totalitarianism might suggest interesting avenues of investigation for psychiatrists. The student of literature, on the other hand, might well condemn a failure of the imagination. While the superficial similarities between the quotations are clear, their differences provide a springboard to understanding Orwell's approach to totalitarianism. Before considering these ideas at length, J.A.Hobson's caveat against the slipperiness of political terms should be heeded. Like 'imperialism', 'totalitarianism' takes on several forms in Orwell's writings, not all of them compatible.

In *The Road To Wigan Pier*, from which the first quotation is taken, Orwell employs the term exclusively for Fascist nations, warning that in

Italy and Germany '[f]or the vision of the totalitarian state there is being substituted the vision of the totalitarian world'.⁵ Crucially, given the discussion of Orwell's use of an eye-witness perspective in earlier chapters, his remarks here come not as a result of a time spent in Berlin and Rome. He had heard the British Fascist leader, Oswald Mosley, speak in Barnsley, but (the Spanish Civil War aside) Orwell's understanding of totalitarianism came less from personal experience than from the reports of others, published in books, newspapers and periodicals. Throughout his essays of the thirties and forties, totalitarianism remains something to be prepared for, something expected, rather than (in Britain, at least) a reality.

Orwell's closest brush with totalitarianism came in Spain. With a bullet through the throat, he literally came into close-range contact with Fascism. At the same time, however, he felt the oppressive force of Communist power. Although he was only physically endangered by Spanish Communists for a matter of weeks, his understanding of what he considered Communist propaganda on the war had a profound and lasting impact. As the last chapter revealed, the suppression of the P.O.U.M. led him to brand the Communists as a 'counter-revolutionary force', and the Communist-sponsored government as having 'more points of resemblance to Fascism than points of difference'. Spain, then, provides a significant moment in Orwell's understanding of totalitarianism.

Orwell nonetheless retained ideas arrived at before the Spanish war. One of these, exemplified in the first quotation, concerns the spiritual dimension of Fascism, which he considered as important as castor oil and truncheons. It also distinguished Fascism from the sterile, mechanistic Utopia held out by Communism. Invoking the legendary Christian hero Roland as the symbol of Fascist self-perception allows Orwell, in *The Road To Wigan Pier*, to criticise the inability of Marxist thinkers to create anything more than materialist models. He argues that the masses in the Fascist states

could only be stampeded into Fascism because Communism attacked or seem to attack, certain things (patriotism, religion, etc.) which lay deeper than the economic motive.⁶

Orwell turns Marxist thought on its head in this argument, the questioning of economic determinism correlating with his early moralistic approach to imperialism, considered in Chapter Two.

As with Orwell's understanding of imperialism, however, his association with the I.L.P. led to a change of heart and mind. The second quotation at the head of the chapter, equating Fascism and capitalism, signals a new position. As the chapter on imperialism made clear, for at least part of the late thirties Orwell used supposed similarities with Nazi Germany to vilify the British Empire.

While in the late thirties Orwell found it possible to link German Fascism and British imperialism, his experiences in Spain and the manipulation of Spanish Civil War news in England made him sensitive to another aspect of totalitarianism equally as menacing as truncheons and castor oil. As a writer, he feared the suppression of free speech, a fear exemplified in the third quotation at the head of the chapter, which links that suppression to concentration camps. As the last chapter demonstrated, Orwell was keen to expose suppression and self-censorship on the political Left. Indeed, he suspected, with varying degrees of plausibility, that left-wing publishers (including his own, Victor Gollancz) editors such as Kingsley Martin, periodicals such as the *The New Statesman and Nation* and organisations such as the Left Book Club, were under the control or at least the influence of British Communists.

Orwell considered that such censorship bled into creative writing; writers, poets and novelists sympathetic to the Communist cause had jettisoned individual perspectives in favour of party orthodoxy. As with certain editors and publishers, he suspected the dominance of a small but influential elite, most obviously the writers huddled around Auden. While the Fascists might have the monopoly on supplies of castor oil, in Orwell's view Communists or their sympathisers were adept at the control of ideas and the channelling of creativity into ideologically approved regions. Considering the menace to literature and free speech brings to the foreground questions concerning the public sphere. Orwell was a late entrant into debates over the threat of Fascism and the reality of Communism; many perceptions had informed Left debates from the early thirties. His essays must be seen in relation to already-established positions, alliances and antagonisms, much of them given publicity through periodicals. This chapter provides the necessary background to those debates.

Throughout the thirties and into the forties, bewildering and unforeseen developments required the realignment of political and literary positions. For example, the assessment of the rise and importance of Fascism was complicated by often widely contradictory analyses of the

Soviet Union, a country which for many represented the only barrier to Fascist aggression. The changes in Orwell's attitudes can be seen as consequent upon such perceptions and developments. The rapid political changes are no better demonstrated than by the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression which signalled the onset of war. Where, before August, 1939 Communism and Fascism had proclaimed themselves mortal enemies, the pact appeared to signal a cynical, unholy alliance. Communist Party membership plummeted, and former supporters of the party such as Victor Gollancz became virulent critics.

In May 1940, in a sure sign of the changing shape of the debate, the *Left News* published Gollancz's 'Open Letter' to the Communist Party of Great Britain, which asked, 'Where Are You Going?', before questioning what Gollancz considered the party's 'revolutionary defeatism'.⁷ This essay proved the first of many similar pieces to appear in the *Left News*, including several by Orwell, which formed the bass of the Gollancz-edited collection, *The Betrayal of the Left*. This bore the damning (if hyper-extended) subtitle: 'An Examination and Refutation of Communist Policy from October 1939 To January 1941: With Suggestions for an Alternative and an Epilogue on Political Morality'.⁸

One of Orwell's *Left News* essays, 'Fascism and Democracy', provides the fourth quotation at the beginning of the chapter. In this, Orwell uses the very lack of the use of castor oil and truncheons in Britain to defend what he recognises as his country's flawed democracy. Alluding to the military and ideological attacks on democracy by Communists and Fascists, he notes that it 'is highly significant that these seeming enemies have both attacked it [democracy] on the same grounds'.⁹ He develops the connections between the two ideologies in an April 1941 *Left News* essay entitled 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', speculating that

[j]ust as at the end of the feudal age there appeared a new figure, the man of money, so at the end of the capitalist age there appears a new figure, the man of power, the Nazi gauleiter or Bolshevik commissar.¹⁰

In contrast to his earlier differentiation of Fascism and Communism, by the middle of 1941 Orwell is able to personify both in the one totalitarian figure.

The inclusion of Orwell's essays in the *Left News* and in *The Betrayal of the Left* mark something of a reconciliation between Orwell and Gollancz. Although *The Road To Wigan Pier* had proved one of the Left Book Club's

major successes, Orwell's somewhat justifiable belief that the Club was a propaganda vehicle for the Communists had caused mutual suspicion and antagonism between himself and Gollancz. The appearance of his essays in the *Left News*, however, registers the extent to which their ideas (on this topic, in any case) had converged. Most of the theoretical realignment had been on Gollancz's part.

It would be saying too much to argue that in his projection of a successful totalitarian state Orwell envisages the destruction of something akin to Habermas's public sphere. Nevertheless, several interesting parallels will be considered in this chapter, most notably Orwell's perception of the control of the Left print media by Communists, or those sympathetic to Communism. The fact that Orwell considered Victor Gollancz as one of these gives the perception an interesting personal twist. Even so, Orwell was able to get Frederic Warburg to publish *Homage To Catalonia* after Gollancz had turned it down. By 1941 his ideas were being published between the same covers as Gollancz's; and his essays on totalitarianism were published in such diverse periodicals as the *New English Weekly*, *Time and Tide*, *The Adelphi*, *Left News*, *Horizon* and *The Listener*. Thanks at least in part to the periodical medium, and despite the rubber truncheons and castor oil in Europe, thoughts and views in Britain still lay outside the control of totalitarian forces.

Periodical Background

The two periodicals for which Orwell chiefly wrote in the early thirties (the *New English Weekly* and *The Adelphi*) took different approaches to questions concerning Communism and Fascism. In each, however, arguments are set out which find an echo in Orwell's essays. The *New English Weekly* advocated the exotic economic theories of Social Credit of Major C.H. Douglas, but the self-titled 'Review of Public Affairs' only occasionally considered either 'ism'. In February 1934, for example, the American poet William Carlos Williams argues that '[t]he basic intent of Social Credit is to stop Communism this side of the destruction of the English ideal of personal independence'.¹¹ This suggestion has intriguing dimensions when linked with the suggestion in an article later that year by Alexander Raven, the Deputy Director of Policy for

the British Union of Fascists. In 'The Economics of Fascism', Raven states that '[t]he actual [Fascist] method of economic reform will be of special interest to readers'.¹² Ezra Pound, supporter at various times of both Social Credit and Fascism, also contributed to the *New English Weekly*.

The Fascist connection should not be exaggerated. Indeed, Raven's article was refuted by the pseudonymous columnist, 'Gens', in the following issue.¹³ The Scottish poets Hugh Macdiarmid and Edwin Muir, committed Socialists both, supported Douglas's ideas, and Douglas contributed to the left-wing Scottish nationalist periodical, *The Modern Scot*. Orwell himself saw value in the theory: in a letter written in 1933, he comments that 'as a monetary scheme Social Credit is probably sound'.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he dismisses as 'an illusion' the idea of an easy transition to Social Credit.

One advocate who did predict such a transition, 'Gens', is pertinent to Orwell's ideas on Fascism. In a September 1934 article entitled 'The End of Fascism', 'Gens' rejects the possibility of Fascism or Communism triumphing in Britain, erroneously predicting the onset of 'the age of Social Credit'. More perceptively, however, 'Gens' argues that

the main appeals of Fascism are to such ideals as unity, courage, patriotism and loyalty – it claims a mandate from the higher virtues of citizenship.¹⁵

Whether Orwell read this or not remains unknowable, but it bears comparison with Orwell's later argument (cited above) that Fascism defended 'certain things (patriotism, religion, etc.) which lay deeper than the economic motive'.

Orwell uses a similar formulation at the end of 'My Country Right or Left', written in 1940, where he argues for

the possibility of building a Socialist on the bones of a Blimp, the power of one kind of loyalty to transmute itself into another, the spiritual need for patriotism and the military virtues.¹⁶

Interestingly, Orwell here is considering not Fascism, but Socialism. A causal relationship between the 1934 article and Orwell's ideas is not being argued for; what is important is the fact that, in several debates, Orwell's particular emphases are prefigured in the arguments of others.

The Adelphi, Orwell's other main periodical outlet in the early thirties, ceaselessly worried over the correct political tack to take. Much of the blame for this must be laid at the itchy ideological feet of Middleton Murry, whose self-proclaimed 'conversion' to Communism in 1932 launched *The Adelphi* on a course that steered the periodical into radical waters. Murry preached Communism as if from the pulpit, describing it as

a movement that can and *must* demand of men that they should sacrifice their all to it, now. Of no religion in the Western world can that be said. Therefore there is no religion but Communism.¹⁷

Despite the implied global aspect of Communism, in such *Adelphi* essays as 'The Isolation of Russia' and 'The Necessity of Communism', Murry himself keenly promoted the need for a British variant of the creed. As he wrote in the book-length version of 'The Necessity of Communism':

in England Communism *must* be English. If Communism does not feel and obey the inward necessity of becoming English [sic], then Communism will never gain a hold in this country.¹⁸

Orwell would deny the possibility (much less the desirability) of the English Communism preached by Murry. His arguments for British Socialism, however, incorporate the idea that supposedly internationalist ideologies should take account of specific national culture, institutions and history.

The ardour with which Murry embraced Communism eventually cooled. He was, however, alert to the impact of Fascism. In 'Politics, Economics and Freedom', published in the February 1934 number of *The Adelphi*, he anticipates several points later employed by Orwell. In his description of the 'average Englishman's' view of Fascism, for example, he notes the Fascist use of 'doses of castor oil'.¹⁹ Like 'Gens' and (later) Orwell, Murry detects the attractions of Fascism, recognising it as 'essentially a popular movement'.²⁰ He adds a warning to Socialists: 'Let us not deceive ourselves. There is some justification for the use of the word Socialism by National Socialists'.²¹ Compare this to Orwell's assertion two years later in *The Road To Wigan Pier*, that 'Fascism . . . at its very best is Socialism with the virtues left out'.²²

Other periodicals dealt with Communism and Fascism in greater depth, or at least with greater passion. As the official organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the *Daily Worker* naturally kept up a steady barrage of anti-Fascist and pro-Communist argument, championing the achievements of the Soviet Union, while remaining ever-vigilant to the dangers of the Fascist states. The relatively small size of the *Daily Worker* precluded lengthy theoretical analysis: this was left to books by party ideologues. A prime example is R. Palme Dutt's 1934 *Fascism and Social Revolution* which epitomised party thinking. In this work, Dutt argues that Fascism signals the mortal crisis of a capitalism passing into proletarian revolution, when it 'is compelled to resort to even more violent methods . . . in a last desperate effort to maintain its existence and master the contradictions that are rending it'.²³

Anticipating this desperation, the *Daily Worker* placed itself on what appears a permanent war footing, reporting the 1935 Seventh Congress of the Communist International under the headline 'Comintern Reply to Nazi War Threat'.²⁴ By August of that year an article appeared entitled 'For the Defence of Peace: Communist Call For United Action as War Menace Grows', fears that seemed confirmed less than two months later with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.²⁵ In the aftermath of that invasion, a *Daily Worker* article by Party General Secretary Harry Pollitt intones ominously that '[t]he challenge to all of those who are against war and Fascism has come'.²⁶

The Communists were not alone in expecting war early in the thirties. Less than two months after Hitler had been made German Chancellor in January 1933, the I.L.P. *New Leader* declares that '[a]ll over Europe the Forces of War [sic] are mobilizing'.²⁷ Mobilization obviously proceeded slowly. Even so, a year later the paper considers the possibility of 'War in the Autumn?'.²⁸ A front page article in the October 4, 1935 edition of the *New Leader* erroneously wonders, 'War This Weekend?'.²⁹ By March 1936 a pragmatic open-endedness had gained currency in the *New Leader*, a statement in the paper claiming only: 'War Thought Inevitable'.³⁰

The *Left Review* took a similar stance. The first number of the periodical at the end of 1934 carries the full statement of the British Section of the Writers' International group, which includes a call for an association chiefly among those writers

who see in the development of Fascism the terrorist dictatorship of dying capitalism and a menace to all the best achievements of

human culture . . . and who are opposed to all attempts to hinder unity in the struggle [for Socialism] or any retreat before Fascism or compromise with fascist tendencies.³¹

The second number suggests 'a second world war oppressively near'; this in December 1934.³² Once again, the progress to war proved more sluggish than had been feared, or hoped for.

Anti-Fascism and the fear of war also motivated the activities of the Left Book Club. Defending the Club against charges of having a concealed political 'policy', Victor Gollancz responded to these accusations by claiming that the Club 'has no policy than that of equipping people to fight against war and Fascism'.³³ Ironically, this defence appears in the preface to the Club edition of *The Road To Wigan Pier*.

The policy the Left Book Club had been charged with promoting was that of the Popular or People's Front, a loose anti-Fascist coalition which drew on support from Left-leaning clerics, Labour Party radicals such as Aneurin Bevan and Stafford Cripps, the Communist Party, and smaller political groups. Gollancz reasons that

by giving a wide distribution to books which represent many shades of Left opinion . . . we are creating the mass basis without which a genuine People's Front is impossible. In other words, the People's Front is not the "policy" of the Left Book Club, but the very existence of the Left Book Club tends towards a People's Front.³⁴

Gollancz might almost be laying down the basis for an informed public sphere, were it not that his sophistry barely conceals the obvious bias of the Club. More important, however, in terms of the debate over Fascism and Communism, is the fact that the People's Front put the Soviet Union at the forefront of the anti-Fascist cause.

Communism and the Soviet Union

The depiction of the Soviet Union by elements in the British Left affected Orwell's attitude to Communism and, thereby, to Fascism. A crucial question in this regard, and one which tantalised and perplexed the Left, was whether the Soviet Union could be categorised as a Communist

state. While George Bernard Shaw pushed this view, praising Lenin's 'great communist experiment' to a Moscow crowd in 1934, others were more circumspect.³⁵ The question mark in the first edition of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's massive *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* suggests uncertainty, though by the second edition the question mark (and, presumably, the uncertainty) had disappeared.³⁶ Victor Gollancz, in the first editorial of the *Left Book News*, only concedes the Soviet Union the title of 'the country of Socialism', while in the *Left Review* it is described as 'the State where the foundations of Socialism have . . . been laid'.³⁷

The complexities of the problem are captured beautifully in John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle For Power*. Strachey distinguishes 'a primary, transitional, stage of communism, which must follow the revolution', from a 'fully communist society'.³⁸ He argues that 'when we use the word communism we use it to denote not ultimate, fully developed, communism, but the primary transitional stage of communism'. The distinction allows Strachey to perform some rhetorical sleight of hand. He asserts that

it would be absurd to consider the nature of communism without alluding to the Soviet Union. The first thing, however, which we must observe is that never has a single Soviet leader claimed that the Union is today a communist community. The Soviet Union cannot be considered to be as yet a community in even the primary stage of communism Many capitalist remnants are still present. It is hoped, however, that by the end of the Second Five Year Plan, in 1937, that is, it will be possible to speak of a communist society in Russia.³⁹

Strachey (presumably) is writing of a transitional communist society, but by his own timetable the transition occurs with startling speed. Despite problems of definition, *The Coming Struggle For Power* influenced sections of the British Left; Orwell acknowledges having read the book.⁴⁰

Of greater importance in bolstering the Soviet myth was the Webbs' eleven-hundred page *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*. The book wears its millenarianism boldly on its sleeve, as exemplified by some of the chapter titles: 'The Remaking of Man'; 'Science The Salvation of Mankind'; 'The Good Life'. The Webbs claim to detect a distinctive 'morality of Soviet Communism', suggesting the potential for

the Good Life [based] on social equality in the midst of plenty. If this idea seems fantastically utopian, that little fact itself marks the gap between the [capitalist and communist] civilisations'.⁴¹

The book received enthusiastic reviews from the likes of Victor Gollancz. In a letter to Stephen Spender, Gollancz ecstatically labels it 'an amazingly fascinating book' which would remove Spender's worries over the Soviet regime.⁴² The Left Book Club selected the revised edition as its 'Additional Book' for October, 1937. Puffing the book in a review entitled 'The Webbs' Masterpiece', George Bernard Shaw writes, rather ominously, that '[n]obody who has not read it ought henceforth be allowed to write about Russia; for without this groundwork nothing that is happening there is really intelligible'.⁴³

The size of *Soviet Communism* denied it a mass audience; the appendices alone in Volume I of the first edition run to more than 70 pages. For those unable or unwilling to attempt the political marathon without training, the *Left Review* published two threepenny pamphlets containing extracts from the book. The reader of these is urged to undertake the full course at some point, given that 'it will be many, many years before it is supplanted as the most comprehensive and authentic work on the U.S.S.R.'.⁴⁴ Though it was part of Orwell's personal library, it is impossible to be certain whether or not he read *Soviet Communism*; possession of a book does not guarantee that it has been read.⁴⁵

As the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the *Daily Worker* tirelessly championed the Soviet Union, forever comparing that country favourably with Britain. The *Left Review* also took up the banner: the first item in its inaugural number contains extracts from 'Waltz', Louis Aragon's panegyric to the 'unbelievable total of 1,200 mixings [of concrete]' on a single shift at the Tcheliabinsk tractor works.⁴⁶ Socialist realism, the aesthetic blueprint adopted at the Soviet Writer's Conference of 1934, can be detected in the statement of aim of the British Section of the Writers' International, which set up shop in the pages of the periodical.

The Soviet Union as the ideal state for artists was pushed repeatedly in the *Left Review*. In her report of the Soviet Writers' Conference of 1934, Amabel Williams-Ellis enthuses that when the conference was held 'it would hardly be too much to say that . . . the whole of Russia listened'.⁴⁷ Christina Stead argues similarly in reporting the first international Congress of Writers on the defence of culture, held in Paris in 1935. Stead writes that '[t]he problems of most serious liberal-minded writers outside

the U.S.S.R. are real. If they are not persecuted nor in exile, they pant for a public. The giant circulations of the U.S.S.R. suggests a way out'.⁴⁸ The possibility that, if the serious writer panted for a public, the feeling might not be reciprocated, does not seem to have been considered.

Perhaps the extreme example of this acclamation comes in Georgy Dimitrov's speech to the Soviet Writers' Association, published in the *Left Review* in June 1935. Dimitrov proclaims that Soviet writers 'live in the most favourable conditions for their literary production. They live in a country where everything is ebullient, here is construction, enthusiasm, free-play, progress. The atmosphere of the Soviet Union, the very air we breathe, is that of creation'.⁴⁹ Little wonder, then, that Dimitrov's British comrades looked on wide-eyed.

Though the *Left Review's* praise of the Soviet Union was unstinting, the periodical's relatively small circulation undercut the impact of its message. This restriction did not obtain for the *Left Book News* (later, the *Left News*), the Left Book Club's monthly journal. The *Left News* was free to all members of the Club, which by 1939 meant more than 57,000 people.⁵⁰ As well as this captive audience, by the end of 1936 the *Left News* was being sold for sixpence to the public. From the first the journal took a pro-Soviet stance. In the editorial to the initial number, Victor Gollancz gives the rationale behind the founding of the Club as the desire to bring books 'within the financial resources of millions. This may sound high flown; but the almost incredible circulation of books in the Soviet Union is before us as a glorious example'.⁵¹ Gollancz also proposes the inclusion of a monthly article describing developments in the Soviet Union. Written by Ivor Montagu, the column, 'The U.S.S.R. Month By Month', lauded the achievements and abused the critics of that nation. Describing the spread of culture to the masses, Montagu eulogizes that '[t]he Soviet Union is beginning to tap treasures that have never been explored'.⁵² The Draft Constitution of the Soviet Union is considered 'a stocktaking of its liberty . . . the world is amazed by the wealth it sees in store'.⁵³

Montagu's column ran until April 1937, but its discontinuation did not diminish the flow of pro-Soviet articles. In 'Back From The U.S.S.R.', John Lewis adopts a more critical stance than Montagu, but still writes that the Soviet Union is 'the freest country in the world', its people 'building a new world . . . free from exploitation'.⁵⁴ John Strachey assesses the Soviet government report of the trial of Bukharin and others as the 'supreme historical document of our time'.⁵⁵ Despite the perils facing the Soviet Union, exemplified by the trials, Strachey argues that 'the Soviet

Union still forges ahead – like one of her own icebreakers, crashing and crushing her way through the frozen seas. Upon that voyage is staked the future of the human race'.⁵⁶ Perhaps it was too early for Strachey to see the icebergs ahead.

The Road To Wigan Pier: A Preliminary Aside

Before examining Orwell's essays in detail, a short excursion into *The Road To Wigan Pier* must be made, for the book functions as a point of comparison with Orwell's later essays. For the most part, Orwell regards Fascism and Communism as distinct. This should not, however, suggest that he considers them of equivalent importance. Communism merely plays a supporting role to the central conflict between Socialism and Fascism. That choice does not hinge on the question of war or peace, as those in the *Left Review* or the *Daily Worker* might have it, but on ideologies competing for mastery of the State controlled 'machine civilisation' Orwell believes are already in operation. He also argues against the comforting delusion that Fascism might be 'mass sadism' or 'merely an aberration which will presently pass off on its own accord'; those delusions will be shattered 'when somebody coshes you with a rubber truncheon'; what else?⁵⁷

Against the prospect of the ubiquitous truncheon (the castor oil not being required, it seems) Orwell advises that 'in order to combat Fascism it is necessary to understand it, which involves admitting that it contains 'some good as well as much evil'.⁵⁸ He does acknowledge a threat, noting that 'in practice, of course, it is merely an infamous tyranny', but he considers that what draws people to Fascism

may be less contemptible . . . [T]he rank-and-file Fascist is quite often a well-meaning person – quite genuinely anxious, for instance, to better the lot of the unemployed . . . Fascism draws its strength from the good as well as the bad conservatism. To anyone with a feeling for tradition and discipline it comes with its appeal ready-made.⁵⁹

Given the Left Book Club's own avowed anti-Fascism, the choice of *Wigan Pier* as the Club's 'Book of the Month' might seem misguided. Subsequent numbers of the *Left News*, however, carried letters enthusing

not so much at Orwell's argument, which many disagreed with, but at the stimulating debates directly provoked by the book. *The Road To Wigan Pier* sold more than 40,000 copies in the Left Book Club edition. Perhaps as in no other publication before *Animal Farm*, Orwell can be said to have had a noticeable effect on his small section of the public sphere.

In contrast to the treatment of Fascism, Orwell makes only infrequent asides on Communism in *The Road To Wigan Pier*. He characterises (though caricatures might be more correct) the Communist of bourgeois upbringing as one who, though professing otherwise, still clings to the trappings of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois conception of Communism, he contends, derives from arcane books; that of the working-class Communist comes from experience. More contentiously, he claims: 'I have yet to meet a *working* miner, steel-worker, cotton-weaver, docker, navvy or whatnot who was "ideologically" sound'.⁶⁰

The sense of purity and impurity here recalls the hybrids Orwell later employs in his analysis of Spain to register duplicity. In *Wigan Pier*, he draws analogies between Communism and English Roman Catholicism: the vigorous attempt to impose orthodoxy; the fact that the average working Catholic is as little likely to accept all the tenets of Catholic fundamentalism as is the working class Communist. Reinforcing the analogy by invoking the language of religion, he writes that '[t]he [Communist] creed is never found in its pure form in a genuine proletarian'.⁶¹ Instead, left-wing middle class intellectuals, like such Catholic counterparts as G.K.Chesterton, adopt the role of ideological clergy, insisting on and enforcing orthodoxy in all things.

Importantly, this last analogy distinguishes the intellectual ideologue from the common-sense worker. The true motive of the intellectual, in Orwell's demonology, lies not in the quest for 'liberty' and 'justice' (the cornerstones of his preferred form of Socialism at the time) but with the lust for power. This suspicion, directed chiefly at the young bourgeois Left, might be taken as crudely anti-intellectual. A quotation from Strachey's *The Coming Struggle For Power*, gives the suspicion some substance. Strachey professes that

Communism offers no one of this generation a ticket to Utopia. But it does offer to intellectual workers of every kind the one road of escape out of a paralysing atmosphere of paralysing decay, into a social environment which will give a limitless stimulus to the achievements of the mind of man.⁶²

Orwell believed that the Left intelligentsia were susceptible to the blandishments of any ideology offering them power. He warns against 'the young social-literary climbers, who are Communists now, as they will be Fascists five years hence'.⁶³ Furthermore, he argues that by presenting Socialism

in a bad or misleading light – if you let people imagine that it does not mean much more than pouring European civilisation down the sink at the command of Marxists prigs – you risk driving the intellectual into Fascism.⁶⁴

Seemingly, workers are immune from badly presented Socialism. Yet Orwell had no immediate chance to test his theories in a British environment. By the time *Wigan Pier* was published, he was fighting in Spain.

'Spilling The Spanish Beans'

The analysis of 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' in the previous chapter dwelt upon the distortions of the left-wing British press and Orwell's use of his eye-witness position as a corrective to misleading reports. A key claim in the essay, however, exposes something equally serious: 'the real struggle is between revolution and counter-revolution'. More pointedly, Orwell considers it

unfortunate that so few people in England have yet caught up with the fact that Communism is now a counter-revolutionary force; that Communists everywhere are in alliance with bourgeois reformism and using the whole of their powerful machinery to crush or discredit any party that shows signs of revolutionary tendencies.⁶⁵

The claims are as damning as they are sweeping, and in recognising the scope of the assertions comes the realisation that Orwell has taken off the mantle of eye-witness in order to facilitate more general commentary. Admittedly, the specific instance of Communist suppression he cites (the jails of Barcelona bulging with non-Communists revolutionaries) derives from first-hand experience. Nevertheless, the broader claims,

(for example, that 'Communists everywhere are in alliance with bourgeois reformism') logically cannot be the account of an individual eye-witness.

In order to reinforce his claims, Orwell resorts to history, contending that '[t]o see how the present situation arose, one has got to go back to the origins of the civil war'.⁶⁶ Several points of origin suggest themselves: the Spanish revolution of 1931, or the triumph of the Popular Front government in February 1936, being only two of the more recent. For Orwell's purposes, however, these 'origins' begin with Franco's military insurrection of July 1936, barely a year before 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' itself appeared. This telescoped perspective allows the setting up a pivotal antagonism between the 'blatant reactionary' Franco on the one side, and an alliance of working class, peasants and liberal bourgeoisie on the other.

Orwell the historian argues for a fundamental and crucial flaw in the alliance, for though the bourgeoisie might side against the reactionary, they are 'not in the least opposed to a modern version of Fascism, at least so long as it isn't called Fascism'.⁶⁷ Rather than seeing the anti-Franco alliance as cohesive and co-operative, Orwell argues that

you get for a while a situation in which the worker and the bourgeois, in reality deadly enemies, are fighting side by side. This uneasy alliance is known as the Popular Front (or, in the Communist press, to give it a spurious democratic appeal, People's Front).⁶⁸

Several points from the preceding extracts are worth considering: firstly, and most obviously, the question of nomenclature. Both political wings have problems with political labels, though for different reasons. The bourgeoisie would deny the Fascist label, while supporting the practice of a modern form of Fascism. The Communists, by contrast, attempt to attach a 'spurious democratic' label onto something that in fact does not exist. Yet, despite the superficial differences of approach and ideology, there is a common misuse or abuse of language, whether by commission or omission. Such abuse immediately signals duplicity for Orwell. As physically malevolent as truncheons and castor oil might be, the manipulation and distortion of language constitutes a threat that remains central to his conception of totalitarianism.

A second, more oblique point integrated into the quotation above concerns the 'spurious democratic' label of the People's Front, and the

presumably less spurious Popular Front. Both of these groups arose from the call for an anti-Fascist alliance at the Russian-dominated Communist conference in Moscow. In 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' Orwell explicitly forges links between the various national Communist parties, under the control of the Russians. He contends that Russian self-interest requires that it influence the crushing of any genuine revolution in Spain, though he notes that Spanish Communists would deny the charge.

There follows the curious argument that such a denial 'even if true, is hardly relevant, for the Communist Parties of all countries can be taken as carrying out Russian policy'.⁶⁹ The circularity of such a blanket accusation scarcely gives Spanish Communists a possibility to rebut the claim. The statement, however, does fit with Orwell's own brand of Socialism. In this, nations should develop towards Socialism in accordance with their respective traditions and history, not as the result of an imposed and alien theoretical template.

This concern illuminates a third point, Orwell's contention that there exists a monolithic 'Communist press' directed by – or subservient to – the Soviet Union. Orwell does not balance this perception with the revelation of a monolithic Fascist press. In fact, he begins 'Spilling The Spanish Beans' by wondering whether, despite the blatant misreporting of Rothermere's right-wing *Daily Mail*, the left-wing papers 'have done the most harm'. In a letter to Geoffrey Gorer written soon after his return from Spain, he praises Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, declaring that '[t]he only daily paper I have seen in which a glimmer of truth sometimes gets through is the *Express*'. Orwell advises Gorer that, '[w]hatever you do, don't believe a word you read in the *News Chronicle* or *Daily Worker*'.⁷⁰

In 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' the Communist press takes on Murdochian proportions, Orwell ending the first part of the essay by claiming that

it is certain that the Spanish Communists, plus the right-wing Socialists whom they control, plus the Communist press of the whole world, have used all their immense and ever-increasing influence upon the side of counter-revolution.⁷¹

It seems almost unnecessary to repeat that the generic conventions of the essay allow such grandiose statements without requiring the burden of proof. Indeed, the material to substantiate these claims would require many pages, something Orwell hoped he could incorporate into

Homage to Catalonia, then still in its infancy. Though he did so, the book flopped.⁷²

The salvo at Communist anti-revolutionary practice which ends the first part of the essay prepares the ground for the second, which sets out to lay bare Communist propaganda. Orwell begins with a feigned withdrawal, admitting that '[a]ny Communist would reject . . . [my account] as mistaken or wilfully dishonest'.⁷³ While Orwell naturally rejects the counterclaim, he nevertheless wishes it published. Publication (within the parameters of his own essay, of course) provides Orwell with an opportunity for drawing attention to Communist propaganda, the easier to attack it. 'Broadly speaking,' he argues, 'Communist propaganda depends upon terrifying people with the (quite real) horrors of Fascism'. This additionally involves 'pretending . . . that Fascism has nothing to do with capitalism', that it is 'an aberration, "mass sadism"'.⁷⁴ The idea that Communists could conceptualise Fascism as something distinct from capitalism seems curious in the light of, for example, Palme Dutt's *Fascism and Social Revolution*, cited above. Yet the idea of a Popular Front required the participation of the bourgeoisie in the broad alliance against Fascism. Hence, the Communist cover-up over the links between Fascism and capitalism.

While acknowledging the success of the strategy, Orwell notes that not everybody is fooled. He depicts a certain sort of revolutionary, the 'troublesome person who points out that Fascism and bourgeois "democracy" are Tweedledum and Tweedledee'.⁷⁵ This troublesome person bears a strong familial resemblance to the 'honest doubter' of the early part of the essay. Orwell recognises the Communist need 'to get rid' of such an irritant. Strangely, though something more than a hefty dose of castor oil might be employed, Orwell contends that the form such action takes involves not force, but words. The irritated begin by calling the revolutionary

an impracticable visionary. You tell him he is confusing the issue . . . that this is not the moment for revolutionary phrasemongery. Later, if he still refuses to shut up, you change your tune and call him a traitor. More exactly, you call him a Trotskyist.⁷⁶

Reversing the childhood truism that sticks and stones are more hurtful than names, Orwell highlights the Communist need to control language. Language, in the form of vilifying labels, can perform the useful political task of neutralising ideological opponents, who might otherwise retain

for themselves the potential to employ language as a critical tool. Orwell goes on to answer the question, 'what is a Trotskyist?', revealing that, although commonly used in Spain to describe or decry a disguised Fascist posing as a revolutionary, 'it derives its peculiar power from the fact that it means three separate things': a supporter of world revolution; a member of Trotsky's organisation, or a disguised Fascist. These three meanings can be 'telescoped one into the other at will', the practical result being that

[i]n Spain, to some extent even in England, *anyone* professing revolutionary Socialism (i.e. professing the things the Communist Party professed until a few years ago) is under suspicion of being a Trotskyist in the pay of Franco or Hitler.⁷⁷

In fact, and whether or not Orwell himself was aware, the process of linking Trotsky and Fascism had begun months before he reached Spain. The spur for this linkage had been the trial in Moscow of supposed Trotskyist collaborators, amongst them Zinoviev and Kamenev, in August 1936. Their confessions led to allegations in the Communist press that Trotsky's activities were funded by and in tune with Communism's avowed enemy, the Fascists. The unsettling spectacle of the Revolution's heroes admitting to monstrous, barely credible crimes, caused many to hold back judgement on the trials; others were less suspicious, or cautious. In the pages of *Controversy*, for example, a torrid debate raged. Though some, like Jon Evans, admit that '[n]o trial in all history is as bewildering and as baffling . . . [and] no complete and feasible explanation has yet been given', others were less reticent.⁷⁸ F.W.Chandler sceptically refuted the veracity of the trials in an essay entitled 'Were They Guilty?'.⁷⁹ From the other political pole of Left thought, Pat Sloan was adamant: 'They *Were* Guilty'.⁸⁰

Pertinently, the Left Book Club, partly through its monthly organ the *Left News*, weighed in in favour of the veracity of the trials, making the necessary noises against Trotsky. In the October 1936 instalment of his invariably ecstatic column, 'The USSR Month By Month', Ivor Montagu howls that Trotsky

is called counter-revolutionary, Fascist. That is right . . . Trotsky today speaks of the Soviet Union *in precisely the same terms . . . as those used by Hitler at Nuremberg*. Trotsky to-day in World politics demands what? The same as Fascism, the liquidation of the

Comintern. Is it any accident that Trotsky and Fascism should speak the same language? No...⁸¹

Clearly, Orwell was not the only writer to consider language the index of political affiliation.

Orwell ends 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' with a stinging attack on the failure of the British left-wing press to depict properly the events in Spain. The rationale behind this deception, he argues, is 'that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used a Fascist propaganda'. Orwell derides this attitude as one of 'cowardice'.⁸² Yet the long-term dangers are more serious, he considers, for the failure to tell the truth about Spain means that the British public does not gain an understanding either of Fascism, or the way it can be combatted. As a result, he judges

the *News Chronicle* version of Fascism as a kind of homicidal mania peculiar to Colonel Blimps bombinating in the economic void has been established more firmly than ever. And thus we are one step nearer to the great war 'against Fascism' . . . which will allow Fascism, British variety, to be slipped over our necks during the first week.⁸³

This grim warning against the consequences of the distortion of the reports of the Spanish Civil War register Orwell's understanding of the importance of the print medium. In the absence of other information, what the press prints becomes 'truth'. Admittedly, Orwell argues for a rather crude causality between the printed word and public perceptions: the public, after all, need not believe what it reads in papers and periodicals. He also overstates the importance of the Spanish Civil War in the general understanding of Fascism. Spanish Fascism provided only one variety of the creed; suspicion of – and antagonism to – Germany remained a feature of much of the press. Nevertheless, Orwell's broad argument, that the level of public debate is dependent on the information available, has great plausibility. Certainly, this notion is built into Habermas's conception of an active, progressive public sphere. As the decade progresses, Orwell comes to consider that even the limited press freedoms obtaining in Britain are in danger of being shackled, if not locked away permanently. Indeed, a central pillar in his understanding of totalitarianism concerns the control of the printed word.

Review of *The Workers' Front*

Orwell spent the latter half of 1937 writing *Homage To Catalonia* and attempting to publicise his own views on the Spanish Civil War. These activities drew him closer to the I.L.P., and he contributed to the party paper, *New Leader*. At the beginning of 1938 year he reviewed *The Workers' Front* by I.L.P. stalwart and *New Leader* editor, Fenner Brockway; the review provides a thumbnail sketch of his attitude to anti-Fascism.⁸⁴ Brockway attacks the Popular Front as inherently a mechanism of 'class-collaboration', the effect of which will be 'the fixing of the capitalist class more firmly in the saddle'.⁸⁵ As he had done with Brockway's views on Spain, Orwell accepts this analysis, writing that '[t]here is very little doubt that this is true, and a short time ago few people would have bothered to deny it'.⁸⁶

As in 'Spilling The Spanish Beans', Orwell's acceptance of a particular argument as 'true' provides the impetus for examining the reasons why such an argument is not more widely held. In the review he argues that

unfortunately the menacing rise of Hitler has made it very difficult to view the situation objectively. Rubber truncheons and castor oil have scared most people . . . into forgetting that Fascism and capitalism are at bottom the same thing'.⁸⁷

While utilising the images of truncheon and castor oil, as he had done in *The Road To Wigan Pier*, Orwell subtly modifies his argument: 'Roland at the pass at Roncevaux, defending Christendom against the barbarian' is replaced by a bogey man: Hitler. Fear on the Left, according to both Orwell and Brockway, leads to the desire for protection behind the Popular Front. The result, Orwell considers, is 'the nauseous spectacle of bishops, Communists, cocoa-magnates, publishers, duchesses and Labour M.P.s marching arm in arm to the tune of 'Rule Britannia''.⁸⁸

A key point of Brockway's book, which Orwell accepts, is that Fascism must be seen as a form of capitalism. Orwell summarises Brockway's point: 'Fascism can only be combatted by attacking capitalism in its non-Fascist as well as its Fascist forms'.⁸⁹ This position attacks those advocating a People's Front who portray Fascism as an aberrant political form that must be destroyed on its own. In 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', remember, Orwell warns against viewing 'Fascism as kind of homicidal mania'. Where Orwell differs from Brockway, however, is in suggesting

(as he had done in *Wigan Pier*) that the 'huge middle class whose interests are identical with those of the proletariat' must be recognised as potentially antagonistic to capitalism. The consistency with which Orwell proposes this argument over time probably overrides its truth content.

Review of *Assignment in Utopia*

Orwell notes at the end of his review of *Workers' Front* that, underlying questions of the Popular Front, 'is the question of the huge though inscrutable changes that are occurring in the U.S.S.R.'.⁹⁰ In sharp contrast to his arguments on British imperialism and the Spanish Civil War, Orwell's understanding of the Soviet Union was uninformed by personal experience. A book such as Eugene Lyons', *Assignment in Utopia*, which Orwell reviewed in the *New English Weekly* in June 1938, provides him with the first-hand account of someone who had travelled to the Soviet Union.

As with other reviews (and other reviewers) Orwell uses much of the available space to publicise his own argument. He begins the review with a lengthy, surreal translation of recent Soviet history into English terms: Churchill is an exiled Trotsky; Beefeaters at the Tower of London are Comintern agents; industrialists foment strikes in their own factories. The point of this parody is to show that such a situation could not arise in England. Orwell describes it as 'sinister enough in its way . . . that Communists over here regard [the Soviet Union] as a good advertisement for Communism'.⁹¹

The review appeared under the title 'The Impenetrable Mystery', that mystery being the real situation in the Soviet Union. For the most part Orwell accepts Lyons' analysis, which details repression, Party dominance, the terror of the G.P.U., and a cult of personality founded on Stalin. From this grim portrait Orwell draws the conclusion that the system described 'does not seem to be very different from Fascism'.⁹² Labelling (and libelling) the Soviet Union in this way clearly distinguishes him from those on the Left who continued to champion the nation. Yet the point has a political kick, for by implication the fact that British Communists perceive the Soviet Union 'as a good advertisement for Communism' calls into question not only their judgement, but also the very programme they themselves wish to implement.

'Why I Join the I.L.P.'

As noted in the previous chapter, in joining the I.L.P. in the middle of 1938, Orwell reinforced his antagonism towards the Communists. The two parties had argued constantly in the mid-thirties, most vehemently about the Spanish Civil War. Both also styled themselves as the true representatives of revolutionary Socialism in Britain. At the same time, the I.L.P.'s brand of anti-Fascism distinguished it from those on the Left (including the Communists) organising for a Popular Front. For the I.L.P., by contrast, the struggle against Fascism was merely an aspect of the broader struggle against capitalism.

'Why I Join the I.L.P.' operates as a personal statement of commitment. Immediately acknowledging himself as a writer, Orwell's makes the perhaps surprising admission that 'the impulse of every writer is to "keep out of politics"'. Yet this impulse, he recognises, is no longer practicable, for,

[t]o begin with, the era of free speech is closing down . . . We have seen what has happened in Italy and Germany, and it will happen here sooner or later. The time is coming – not next year, perhaps not for ten or twenty years, but it is coming – when every writer will have the choice of being silenced altogether or of producing the dope that a privileged minority demands.⁹³

Despite the dark prediction of the end of free speech, the effect of this statement is almost bathetic; the writer appears to have a choice between silence and the production of dope. The very vagueness of the timetable for what is deemed inevitable (the time is coming, but perhaps not for twenty years) undercuts any sense of immediate crisis.

Tensions between certainty and uncertainty, between what is destined and what merely is a potentiality, run through the essay. Orwell considers, for example, that 'if Fascism triumphs, I am finished as a writer'; but much depends on the 'if'. He goes on to argue that Socialism provides the necessary antidote to the poison of Fascism. Yet his mistrust of the ideological steadfastness of the Labour Party leads him to conclude that only the I.L.P. works for the type of Socialism he could endorse. In addition the I.L.P. is deemed the only party 'likely to take the right line either against imperialist war or against Fascism when it appears in its British form'.⁹⁴ While Orwell appears to expect Fascism, the essay is, in fact, invigorated by the sense of purpose that

hopes to combat the ideology.

Given Orwell's argument about the need for Socialism to take account of the specific national characteristics, his belief that British Fascism would take a British form is understandable. In part, it reprises the position set out in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', though in the earlier essay the British press is accused of unwittingly assisting the cause of Fascism by falsely reporting the situation in Spain. The link between British Fascism and imperialist war, however, does distinguish 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' from 'Spilling the Spanish Beans'. As he had done in his review of *Workers' Front*, Orwell acknowledges the I.L.P. line that the impending war would result from the (inevitable) clash of imperial interests, rather than as an ideological battle between democracy and Fascism. The war, in other words, would involve equally rapacious capitalist nations fighting for imperial dominance.

Accepting this allows Orwell to criticise those (like supporters of the People's Front) who urge that Britain and its allies should rearm against the Fascist threat. Orwell states that experiences in Spain

brought home to me the fatal danger of mere negative 'anti-Fascism'. Once I grasped the essentials of the situation in Spain I realized that the I.L.P. was the only British party . . . I could join with at least the certainty that I would never be led up the garden path in the name of capitalist democracy.⁹⁵

The argument implies an attack on the British Labour Party, which by 1938 was endorsing rearmament, national unity and 'collective security' under the League of Nations as the proper ways to combat Fascism. At the same time, Orwell rejects the Communist Party line that the fight against Fascism must override other considerations. The failing of that line of argument, as Orwell had noted in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', is the belief that Fascism is an *aberration*, a 'homicidal mania peculiar to Colonel Blimps'. In joining the I.L.P., Orwell adopts a more thorough-going analysis of the threat of Fascism. 'Why I Join The I.L.P.' publicises that acceptance.

Membership of the I.L.P. and the publication of his position in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' mark a radicalisation of Orwell's political stance. The brevity of the essay does not allow him to elaborate in detail on British Fascism, though the readers of the *New Leader* hardly need the exposition of their own party's arguments. A *New Leader* article in October 1938 put the I.L.P.'s analysis bluntly, asking the rhetorical

question:

[w]hat is it to be – National Unity and a Fascist Britain or the Class Struggle for the overthrow of Capitalism and Fascism everywhere? That is the choice before the British workers.⁹⁶

The party's small resources and minimal parliamentary representation in 1938 make such Manichean analysis seem like hollow rhetoric. Even so, the key assumption of the I.L.P. argument, that Fascism was a variant of capitalism, rather than an opposing ideology, was one Orwell would promote until the eve of war.

'Not Counting Niggers'

'Not Counting Niggers', published in *The Adelphi* in July 1939, was dealt with in the chapter on imperialism. In fact, the topics are linked, for Orwell attacks the sham 'anti-Fascism' of those on the Left for whom 'one threat to the Suez canal, and "anti-Fascism" and "defence of British interests" are discovered to be identical'.⁹⁷ While admitting that it would be 'very shallow' to tar all anti-Fascist activity with this brush, Orwell considers it a fact that

the political obscenities of the past few years . . . would not have been possible without this guilty consciousness that we are all in the same boat.⁹⁸

The passengers on that boat, Orwell notes, include 'Quakers shouting for a bigger army, Communists waving Union Jacks [and] Winston Churchill posing as a democrat'; a rum crew, indeed.

The point of this attack is to expose the key political fact, in the eyes of Orwell and the I.L.P., that British imperialism is as miserable a system as German Fascism. As the chapter on imperialism made clear, Orwell rates the former a 'far vaster injustice' than the latter, an accusation that fits with a consistent I.L.P. line.

As a consequence of the notion that the threatened war between 'Fascism' and 'Democracy' would be simply an imperialist battle, the I.L.P. argued against any support for such a war. Towards the end of 'Not Counting Niggers' Orwell ponders the effects of war-preparation

itself. He considers it 'doubtful whether prolonged war-preparation is morally better than war itself', predicting that three of four years of such preparation may result in Britain sinking 'almost unresisting into some local variant of austro-Fascism'.⁹⁹ He argues for the possibility of a reaction to austro-Fascism, but, crucially, that the reaction would not come from the Left. Instead, Orwell projects that 'there will appear something we have never had in England yet – a real Fascist movement'.¹⁰⁰

Orwell's fear that a real Fascist movement will appear does not hide the fact that much of this section of 'Not Counting Niggers' is conjectural. Orwell's political predictions are as much warnings as analysis; they function to effect political activity and decision making in the immediate present, rather than to accurately map out the unknown territory of the future. Certainly, the turbulent political currents in 1939 prevented any easy assessment either of the course of events or the reactions of the respective parties. Analyses could become obsolete with alarming speed.

Ironically, the outbreak of war only two months after the publication of 'Not Counting Niggers' negated Orwell's hypotheses about the effects of war-preparation. Yet, in a sense, this is less important than the fact that he was able to publicise his views quickly in the periodical format. As with most of Orwell's essays in the period, however, the caveat must be added that the small circulation of such periodicals as *The Adelphi*, in which 'Not Counting Niggers' first appears, necessarily limits the audience for such views. Nevertheless, for a relatively little-known left-wing writer of independent bent, the opportunities afforded by the periodical medium were invaluable.

World War Two and Realignment

On the eve of war, though Orwell retained an antagonism to the influence of Communism in Britain, Fascism looms as the far more ominous threat. Indeed, the sharpest barbs Orwell hurls at the Communists are those which accuse them of being like the Fascists. He takes his line on Fascism from the I.L.P.: Fascism is simply a variant of capitalism; both must be fought against if Socialism is to triumph. Yet, once the war began, Orwell quickly realigns himself, arguing in 'My Country Right or Left' for the defence of Britain against Fascist Germany. This position entailed breaking with I.L.P., which maintained its staunch anti-imperialist war position.

The Communist Party also refused to support the British war effort, a stand that brought down wrath from an unlikely source: the former party sympathiser, Victor Gollancz. As Orwell's publisher, Gollancz had occasionally used his influence to stifle Orwell's views. In 1938 Orwell had accused the Left Book Club of being under the influence of Communist 'censorship'.¹⁰¹ With the coming of war, however, the gulf between their political positions began to close. In a letter to Geoffrey Gorer in early 1940, Orwell writes of seeing Gollancz, who was

furious with his Communist late-friends, owing to their lies etc., so perhaps the Left Book Club may become quite a power for good again, if it manages to survive.¹⁰²

The Club did survive, although its membership collapsed during the war.

Gollancz's worry about Communist party activity in Britain was made plain in an 'Open Letter' to the Communists in the May 1940 *Left News* which asked, 'Where Are You Going?'. By January 1941 Gollancz was not so much asking as telling, vigorously attacking the Communists in a major *Left News* essay, 'The C[ommunist] P[arty], Revolutionary Defeatism, and the "People's Convention"'. In this essay, Gollancz charges that

Communists certainly do not desire Hitler's victory. But what is important is not their subjective desire, but the inevitable *result* of their defeatist tactics.¹⁰³

This argument formed the basis for *The Betrayal of the Left*, an attack on the actions of the Communist Party edited by Gollancz, which included chapters from Gollancz, John Strachey and Orwell. One of Orwell's contributions was 'Fascism and Democracy'.

'Fascism and Democracy'

'Fascism and Democracy' first appeared in the February 1941 issue of the *Left News*, the second of three Orwell essays to be published in the Left Book Club periodical at the beginning of 1941.¹⁰⁴ That the essays appeared in *Left News* at all signals the rapprochement between

Orwell and Gollancz. Despite the balance of interest implied in the title, Orwell spends most of 'Fascism and Democracy' examining the case for democracy. Intertwined with this analysis, and indeed provoked by it, is an examination of the attacks on democracy by both Communists and Fascists.

Interestingly, given Orwell's haymaking swipes on the pervasive Communist press in his essays on the Spanish Civil War, in 'Fascism and Democracy' he acknowledges the 'bolder methods of propaganda' of the Fascists. Whatever the differences between the two, however, Orwell considers that 'the basic contention of all apologists of totalitarianism is that Democracy is a fraud'.¹⁰⁵ He reviews the anti-democratic case, willing, he writes, 'to admit the large measure of truth it contains'. The primary arguments are simple enough: the opportunity to vote is, to use Orwell's ugly neologism, 'negatived by economic inequality'; the monied class keeps all effective political and economic power.

Orwell argues for another force in democratic nations, however, which he describes as the '[m]ost important of all', this being the fact that

nearly the whole cultural and intellectual life of the community – newspapers, books, education, films, radio – is controlled by monied men who have the strongest motive to prevent the spread of ideas. The citizen of a democratic country is 'conditioned' from birth onwards, less rigidly but not much less effectively than he would be in a totalitarian state.¹⁰⁶

This judgement broadens the scope of Orwell's attack upon the restriction of ideas. Hitherto, the bulk of his venom had been directed at the left-wing print media; in recognising the 'conditioning' carried out in democracies as well as in totalitarian states, Orwell appears on the verge of a radical cultural critique.

The key phrase in the preceding argument, however, is 'not much less effectively'. Orwell is willing to grant that democratic nations exhibit many of the negative aspects of their totalitarian counterpart; 'all government, democratic or totalitarian, rests ultimately upon force'. Yet his central attack upon critiques of democracy is their 'implied argument . . . that a difference of degree is not a difference'.¹⁰⁷ For Orwell, the difference of degree between the oppressiveness in totalitarian and democratic states is of fundamental importance.

While democracies do condition their inhabitants, in Orwell's view they do so 'less effectively' than do totalitarian regimes. In democracies,

he notes, a newspaper like the Communist *Daily Worker* might be suppressed, but it had been allowed to survive ten years, and its editors had not been liquidated, as would have happened under a totalitarian regime. Refugees have not fled the British Empire; ~~heterodox~~ opinions can be expressed in pubs (though not, Orwell quickly forgets, in certain Communist newspapers); nothing in recent American or British history approximates the purges and pogroms the Soviet Union or Germany; 'Fascism and Democracy' itself could not be printed in a totalitarian nation. These facts for him point to crucial differences of degree between the two forms of rule. Not surprisingly, Orwell asks the question which illuminates the hall-mark of totalitarian oppression: 'How many people personally known to you have been beaten with rubber truncheons or forced to swallow pints of castor oil?'¹⁰⁸

The number of incidents of rubber truncheon beatings and forced castor oil swallowing in Britain being tolerably low, Orwell is able to come down in favour of democracy over totalitarianism. Even so, he recognises the threat posed by totalitarian regimes. Britain as it stands at the beginning of 1941 cannot hold out against German power, Orwell argues; he advocates Socialist revolution as the only hope for survival. His arguments for this are considered in the next chapter, but they centre on a Socialism which does not derive from European doctrine, but which takes account of the historical and cultural heritage of England.

The argument for national variants of Socialism allows Orwell to target the actions of the Communists, the obvious rivals for dominance of left-wing aspirations. He claims that Communism was always a 'lost cause in western Europe', and that the respective Communist parties became 'mere publicity agents' for the Soviet Union:

Instead of pointing out that Russia was a backward country from which we might learn, but could not be expected to imitate, the Communists were obliged to pretend that the purges, 'liquidations', etc. were healthy symptoms which any right-minded person would like to see ~~transferred~~ to Britain.¹⁰⁹

Heavy sarcasm does not detract from a more serious point, that in the absence of an alternative party with an avowed revolutionary intent, the Communists provided the only focus for such aspirations. The complete lack of reference to Orwell's former colleagues in the I.L.P. heavily underlines his split from that party. Worse than the Communist dominance of revolutionary fervour, however, Orwell judges

that Communist activity may spread defeatism, helping Hitler as a consequence. In this, he is in agreement with Gollancz's accusation that Communist Party policy amounted to 'revolutionary defeatism'.

Orwell, the B.B.C. and *The Listener*

The publication of essays in the *Left News* gave Orwell access to a larger audience than had been the case with periodicals such as *New English Weekly* and *The Adelphi*. At the end of 1940 and into 1941, however, he moved into a new medium – radio. In December 1940, he was involved in an interview with Desmond Hawkins on the topic of 'The Proletarian Writer'.¹¹⁰ The interview was broadcast on the B.B.C Home Service, the transcript of the interview being published in the B.B.C. weekly magazine, *The Listener*.

On the strength of that effort, Orwell was commissioned to present a series of talks for the B.B.C. Overseas Service broadcasts to the the Far East. Literature provided the overall topic for the four talks, which were broadcast in April and May of 1941. Though the broadcasts themselves were not heard in Britain, the transcripts were published in essay form in *The Listener* a month after transmission. The Far Eastern radio audience for the talks was impossible to gauge, but it was small enough for Orwell to become depressed about the efficacy of the broadcasts.¹¹¹ Ironically, those who might have read the essay in *The Listener* constituted the largest audience for Orwell's writings to this point: the periodical enjoyed a circulation of nearly 70,000 in the first half of 1941. By way of comparison, *The New Statesman and Nation* circulation for the same period was slightly over 37,000.¹¹² The potential readership for Orwell's *Listener* essays, therefore, exceeded any previous audience for his essays. In addition, readers of *The Listener* were less likely to be politically radical than the readers of, say, *Controversy*. The fact that *The Listener* provided Orwell with a relatively large, diverse audience should not inflate the importance of the essays he had published in the periodical: each essay of roughly 2,000 words, might only take up a page of *The Listener*. Nevertheless, they do provide an insight into his views on literature in the war period. One essay, 'Literature and Totalitarianism', is of particular interest for this chapter.

'Literature and Totalitarianism'

'Literature and Totalitarianism' was broadcast in May 1941 and published in *The Listener* on 19 June 1941.¹¹³ The last of the four B.B.C. talks, it operates both as a summary of the present condition of literature, and as a projection of the future of literature. In fact, Orwell claims that literature may not have a future. Accepting the possibility that totalitarianism may triumph, he asks: 'can literature survive in [a totalitarian] atmosphere? I think one must answer shortly that it cannot'.¹¹⁴ Two obvious questions are generated by this claim: what aspect of totalitarianism makes it peculiarly lethal to literature? How certain is the triumph of totalitarianism?

To begin with, Orwell makes the crucial assertion that 'this is not a critical age'.¹¹⁵ He notes the invasion of literature by politics, to the extent that it has become difficult to write 'honest, unbiased criticism'; detachment has been replaced by partisanship. This decline in the vigour and integrity of criticism has, for Orwell, vital implications for society generally and literature specifically. In social terms, the failings of criticism signal something broader and more ominous: that '[w]e live in an age in which the autonomous individual is ceasing to exist'.¹¹⁶ Given this, the implications for literature are dire, Orwell arguing that

[m]odern literature is essentially an individual thing. It is either the truthful expression of what one man [sic] thinks and feels, or it is nothing.¹¹⁷

The time-scale involved is important in this argument. Orwell's bleak prognosis for literature and individual autonomy ~~implicitly~~ carries the possibility of a cure: something ceasing to exist still survives in the mean time, after all. The functioning totalitarian state, however, already 'does not and probably cannot allow the individual any freedom whatever'. Orwell continues, that

[w]hen one mentions totalitarianism one thinks immediately of Germany, Russia, Italy, but I think one must face the risk that the phenomenon is going to be world-wide.¹¹⁸

The key word here (and the one which offers an alternative) is 'risk', for clearly the possibility remains that totalitarianism might not triumph

globally.

The fact that Orwell perceives powerful totalitarian states already operating allows him both to register a warning and to analyse those states. He cautions that such states have 'abolished freedom of thought to an extent unheard of in any previous age', before examining how that abolition has been achieved.¹¹⁹ For Orwell, the control of thought has negative and positive directives: citizens of totalitarian states are told not only what not to think, but also what they should think. As a result, citizens are shut up in an 'artificial universe' containing no 'standards of comparison'.¹²⁰ In such a world, Orwell argues, the literature of individual thought and feeling must come to an end.

Grim though this portrait is, it does not of itself distinguish totalitarian control from history's other powerful orthodoxies. What sets totalitarianism apart, Orwell contends, is that, while previous orthodoxies circumscribed thought, restricting individuals between restrictive but relatively stable boundaries, totalitarianism

though it controls thought . . . does not fix it. It sets up questionable dogmas, and it alters them from day to day. It needs the dogmas, because it needs absolute obedience from its subjects, but it cannot avoid the changes, which are dictated by the needs of power politics. It declares itself infallible, and at the same time it attacks the very concept of objective truth.¹²¹

This manipulation of thought entails a manipulation of emotion. As an example of the rapid mental readjustments required, Orwell employs the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, after which ordinary Germans, taught to 'regard Russian Bolshevism with horror and aversion' suddenly were asked to look upon the same regime 'with admiration and affection'.¹²² Such external control of the emotions necessarily undermines the emotional autonomy of the writer. In the decline of literature in Germany, Russia and Italy, Orwell detects the outward manifestations of the triumph of totalitarianism.

As already noted, while accepting the possibility that freedom of thought might be coming to an end, Orwell does not deem this inevitable. 'Literature and Totalitarianism' ends with the statement of a belief that literature and free thought may survive 'in those countries in which liberalism has struck its deepest roots, the non-military countries, western Europe and the Americas, India and China'.¹²³ The inclusion of India and China can be put down, at least in part, to the radio audience

for the essay. Clearly, however, the future of free thought and of literature is intricately woven into the winning of the war against Germany.

Despite this martial aspect, what strikes home in 'Literature and Totalitarianism' is the extent to which the success of the ideology derives not so much from the employment of physical force (castor oil and rubber truncheons) but on the control of thought and emotion. One vivid signal of that control lies in what Orwell sees as the adulterated literary output of totalitarian states. A key bulwark against such control remains the free-thinking individual, the honest doubter Orwell had invoked in his reporting of the Civil War in Spain: a symbol of autonomy in a world of orthodoxy.

'Wells, Hitler and the World State'

Doubting individuals, however, need not necessarily be correct. Ironically, in an essay published several months after 'Literature and Totalitarianism', Orwell launches an attack on a writer he acknowledges as one of the most influential of the early twentieth century. 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', published in *Horizon* in August 1941, begins with Orwell criticising H.G. Wells's doubt over the importance of Hitler and the strength of the German military. Wells goes wrong, Orwell considers, in being too sensible, too logical. As such, he fails to appreciate that

[t]he energy that actually shapes the world springs from emotions – racial pride, leader-worship, religious belief, love of war – which liberal intellectuals mechanically write off as anachronisms . . . 124

Broadening the attack to include liberal intellectuals as a group functions in several ways. Most directly, it targets the readers of *Horizon* itself. While not read solely by this type, the periodical certainly could muster up a sizeable number who would answer to the name, justifiably or otherwise. At the same time, Orwell does not weaken his critique by limiting it to Wells, no matter how much influence Wells might have had. Yet, in employing Wells as a seminal figure, Orwell can visit the sins of the father upon his children. By labelling Wells as one of yesterday's men, Orwell also is able to dispatch both Wells and his supporters to the dustbin of history.

Orwell contends that, like Dickens, Wells is a nineteenth-century liberal. Unfortunately, unlike Dickens, Wells lives on into a century

in which his conception of the world and its future have become dangerously outmoded. Wells has been unable to adapt his thinking to modern circumstances; instead, he reprises a single idea,

the supposed antithesis between the man of science who is working towards a planned World State and the reactionary who is trying to restore a disorderly past On the one side science, order, progress, internationalism, aeroplanes, steel, concrete, hygiene: on the other side war, nationalism, religion, monarchy, peasants, Greek professors, poets, horses. History as he sees it is a series of victories won by the scientific man over the romantic man.¹²⁵

Ironically, Orwell contends, whatever the truth once contained in such an antithesis, it has itself been made redundant by the resilience of emotional aspects (nationalism and leader-worship, for example) written off as anachronisms by the likes of Wells. Worse still, such emotions have been harnessed to the very forces which Wells had considered would lead to the construction of an ordered, scientific and enlightened World State. The proof for Orwell lies in the fact that

[m]odern Germany is far more scientific than England, and far more barbarous. Much of what Wells had imagined and worked for is physically there in Nazi Germany. The order, the planning, the State encouragement of science, the steel, the concrete, the aeroplanes, are all there, but all in the service of ideas appropriate to the Stone Age. Science is fighting on the side of superstition.¹²⁶

The tendentiousness of this argument is obvious: steel, concrete and aeroplanes are neither the sole possession of Nazi Germany, nor the necessary consequence of totalitarian organisation. Science also works against superstition. Nevertheless, Orwell's general point, that such elements can be employed in the service of totalitarianism, functions as a critique of Wells's naive Utopianism. Against the view that a future of science, concrete and steel would herald in an age of security and pleasure, Orwell argues for the possibility that the same materials, mixed with the emotional elements tapped by totalitarianism, will usher in tyranny.

As in 'Literature and Totalitarianism', however, writers provide one antidote to the poison of the ideology. This in part explains Orwell's choice of Wells as a target for his attack on liberal intellectuals who misjudge the importance and the allure of totalitarianism. As a writer, Wells

operates as a public (and published) representative of the tendency. Yet there exist certain writers better equipped to understand the dangers: 'Trotsky, Rauschning, Rosenberg, Silone, Borkenau, Koestler and others'.¹²⁷ Significantly, Orwell notes, none of these is English, but

nearly all of them have been renegades from one or other extremist party, who have seen totalitarianism at close quarters and know the meaning of exile and persecution.¹²⁸

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Orwell's direct experience of totalitarianism was limited to his time in Spain. As one who put great store in the eye-witness account, the importance of such writers for Orwell is self-evident. He argues towards the end of 'Wells, Hitler and the World State' that '[t]he people who have shown the best understanding of Fascism are either those who have suffered under it or those who have a Fascist streak in themselves'.¹²⁹ The great quality of the writer is the ability to place that understanding before the public. Wells fails (for Orwell) by continuing to publicise a view of totalitarianism based not on experience, but on outmoded generalisations: 'since 1920 he has squandered his talents in slaying paper dragons'.¹³⁰

By late 1941, totalitarianism posed something more of a threat than did paper dragons. The situation remained somewhat fluid, however, for by the time 'Wells, Hitler and the World State' appeared in *Horizon*, Germany had invaded its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union. As a consequence, the Soviet Union, one day an enemy, was the next lauded for its resilient courage. Writing in his diary, Orwell noted disparagingly that:

one could not have a better example of the moral and emotional shallowness of our time, than the fact that we are all now more or less pro-Stalin. This disgusting murderer is temporarily on our side, and so the purges etc. are suddenly forgotten.¹³¹

Not, however, forgotten by Orwell.

Despite his contempt for such about turns, Orwell's own assessment of Fascism, Communism and their fusion in totalitarianism underwent a variety of changes in a relatively short time. As shown in the example of 'Not Counting Niggers' in Chapter Three, Orwell was willing to judge British imperialism a far vaster injustice than Nazi Germany as late as 1939. Yet, as this chapter has charted, certain aspects repeatedly

informed Orwell's conception of totalitarianism. One of these was the emotional level at which (Orwell considered) the ideology exerted its attraction. Orwell uses this psychological dimension as a counterpoint to the materialism of those arguing for the inevitable triumph of Socialism. This debate will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

More important than this emotional aspect, though in certain senses linked to it, is the control of thought and expression under totalitarian regimes. At least as far back as the Spanish Civil War, Orwell detects and decries attempts to restrict either the flow of information or the vigour of criticism. Spain provides a clear example of the workings of Communist propaganda and control, but as the external menace of Fascism supersedes the internal threat of Communism, Orwell is able to see similar approaches to freedom of thought in the seemingly antagonistic ideologies. The attempt to circumscribe free expression becomes a defining element in his conception of totalitarianism. As a consequence, the writer becomes a type of intellectual guerilla, the 'autonomous individual' inherently at odds with the machinery of power. The only weapons available to such a writer are words.

Notes

- 1 George Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, *Complete Orwell: Volume Five*, edited by Peter Davison, (London, 1986), pp. 198–9.
- 2 George Orwell, review of Fenner Brockway, *The Workers' Front*, *New English Weekly*, 17 February 1938, p. 368. *CEJL I*, 304–6.
- 3 George Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 24 June 1938, p. 4. *CEJL I*, 366–8 (p. 367).
- 4 George Orwell, 'Fascism and Democracy', *Left News* (February 1941) 1637–9 (p. 1638).
- 5 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 200.
- 6 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 174.
- 7 Victor Gollancz, 'Where Are You Going? An Appeal to Communists', *Left News* (May 1940), p. 1485.
- 8 *The Betrayal of the Left: An Examination and Refutation of Communist Policy from October 1939 To January 1941: With Suggestions for an Alternative and an Epilogue on Political Morality*, edited by Victor Gollancz (London, 1941).
- 9 Orwell, 'Fascism and Democracy', p. 1637.
- 10 George Orwell, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', *Left News* (April 1941), 1682–85 (p. 1684). This essay is dealt with in the next chapter.
- 11 William Carlos Williams, 'Social Credit as Anti-Communism', *New English Weekly*, 8 February 1934, p. 392.
- 12 Alexander Raven, 'The Economics of Fascism', *New English Weekly*, 6 September 1934, 392–4 (p. 394).

- 13 'Gens', 'The Economics of Fascism', *New English Weekly*, 13 September 1934, pp. 414–5.
- 14 George Orwell, letter to Brenda Salkend, June 1933. *CEJL I*, 120–1 (p. 120).
- 15 'Gens', 'The End of Fascism', *New English Weekly*, 20 September 1934, 439–40 (p. 440).
- 16 George Orwell, 'My Country Right or Left', *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940), 36–41 (p. 41). *CEJL I*, 535–40 (p. 540).
- 17 John Middleton Murry, 'The Necessity of Communism', *The Adelphi* (January 1932), 259–67 (p. 267). 'The Isolation of Russia: and the Way Out', *The Adelphi* (January 1932), pp. 195–205.
- 18 John Middleton Murry, *The Necessity of Communism* (London, 1932), p. 9.
- 19 John Middleton Murry, 'Politics, Economics and Freedom', *The Adelphi* (February 1934), 328–41 (p. 328). Where Orwell's Fascists were to sport rubber truncheons, Murry's carry 'steel wands'.
- 20 Murry, 'Politics, Economics and Freedom', p. 328.
- 21 Murry, 'Politics, Economics and Freedom', p. 331.
- 22 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 204.
- 23 R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (London, 1934), p. 207.
- 24 'Comintern Reply To Nazi War Threat', *Daily Worker*, 27 July 1935, p. 1.
- 25 'For the Defence of Peace: Communist Call For United Action as War Menace Grows', *Daily Worker*, 24 August 1935, p. 4.
- 26 Harry Pollitt, *Daily Worker*, 3 October 1935, p. 1.
- 27 *New Leader*, 17 March 1933, p. 1.
- 28 'War in the Autumn?', *New Leader*, 18 May 1934, p. 2.
- 29 'War This Weekend?', *New Leader*, 4 October 1935, p. 1.
- 30 'War Thought Inevitable', *New Leader*, 6 March 1936, p. 2.
- 31 Writers' International (British Section) Statement, *Left Review* (October 1934), p. 37.
- 32 *Left Review* (November 1934), p. 7.
- 33 Victor Gollancz, Preface to *The Road To Wigan Pier*, included as an Appendix in *Complete Orwell, Volume Five*, 216–225 (p. 217).
- 34 Gollancz, Preface, p. 217.
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- 36 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (London, 1935).
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- 39 Strachey, *Coming Struggle*, p. 354.
- 40 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 189.
- 41 Webbs, *Soviet Communism?*, Volume II, p. 1137.
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- 44 Publisher's note to *Soviet Communism: Dictatorship or Democracy* (October 1936), p. 2. The second pamphlet was *Is Soviet Communism a New Civilisation?* (November 1936). The pamphlets were approximately 30 pages long.
- 45 Orwell's personal library is housed in the Orwell Archive, University of London.
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- 47 Amabel Williams-Ellis, report on Soviet Writers' Conference, *Left Review* (November 1934), 16-28 (p. 17).
- 48 Christina Stead, report on the 'first international Congress of Writers on the defence of culture', *Left Review* (August 1935), 453-62 (p. 453). The congress was held in Paris, 21-5 June 1935.
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- 57 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 199.
- 58 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 198.
- 59 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 198.
- 60 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, pp. 164-5.
- 61 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 166.
- 62 Strachey, *Coming Struggle*, p. 357.
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- 64 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 197.
- 65 George Orwell, 'Spilling The Spanish Beans', *New English Weekly*, Part I, 29 July 1937, 307-8 (p. 307); Part II, 2 September 1937, 328-9. *CEJL I*, 269-76, (p. 270).
- 66 Orwell, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', p. 308. *CEJL I*, p. 270.
- 67 Orwell, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', p. 308. *CEJL I*, p. 271.
- 68 Orwell, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', p. 308. *CEJL I*, p. 271.
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Intelligent Propaganda: Socialism

We can only get ['an effective Socialist party'] if we offer an objective which fairly ordinary people will recognise as desirable. Beyond all else, therefore, we need intelligent propaganda.

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937.¹

What does [the similarity in poems by a Left radical and a jingoistic balladeer] prove? Merely the possibility of building a Socialist on the bones of a Blimp.

George Orwell, 'My Country Right or Left',
Folios of New Writing, 1940.²

What Socialists of, I should say, nearly all schools believe is that the destiny and therefore the true happiness of man [sic] lies in a society of pure communism, that is to say a society in which all human beings are more or less equal, in which no one has the power to oppress another, in which economic motives have ceased to operate, in which men are governed by love and curiosity and not by greed and fear.

George Orwell, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?',
Left News, April 1941.³

Describing Orwell as a national Socialist risks bringing down the considerable wrath of Orwell supporters, even once it has been pointed out that only the word 'Socialist' is capitalised. Several important introductory points are generated by the description, nevertheless. Firstly, Orwell could hardly be considered an international Socialist. Indeed, many of the arguments in his essays attack those who either forecast world revolution, or insist that the proletariat has class allegiances that transcend national boundaries. Orwell was not an advocate of Socialism in one country; rather, he considered that each nation must find a form of Socialism reflective of its culture and history.

Spain provided him with a taste of Socialism in action, but of a distinctively Spanish flavour. In the Britain of the thirties, however, Orwell remained sceptical of the broad public appeal of the arguments put forward for Socialism. One of his earliest essays, 'The

Spike', certainly portrays deprivation in Britain. Yet, against those who forecast the collapse of capitalism, Orwell denied that such a course was inevitable. Rather than being waited for, in Orwell's view Socialism had to be argued for, if it were to succeed in Britain. While he considered that the Second World War opened up the real prospect of Socialist revolution, the boundaries of that revolution were clearly defined: the subtitle for 'The Lion and The Unicorn', Orwell's 1940 call for Socialist revolution, after all, is 'Socialism and the English Genius'.

A second argument for the appropriateness of the national Socialist tag for Orwell is that, at certain points, he considers Fascism and Socialism as variations on a theme. As late as 1941, in his essay 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', he castigates those on the Left for not understanding that Nazism 'was a kind of socialism, though of a non-democratic kind'.⁴ He defines Socialism in the same essay as 'centralised ownership of the means of production, plus political democracy'.⁵ This illustrates a central war-time thesis for Orwell, that of the impending triumph of the planned centralised state (Fascist or Socialist) over capitalism. In 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' he argues that the inevitable success of centralised planning over *laissez-faire* capitalism has been 'demonstrated beyond question during the past two years'. This argument explains what otherwise is a bewildering proposal, that 'Britain can only win [the war] by becoming, more definitely and unmistakably than Nazi Germany, a Socialist state'.⁶

From at least as far back as *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell saw only two available choices for the future: Socialism or Fascism. The element of choice remains important, given his repeated repudiation of overly-deterministic Marxism. Socialism can only succeed for Orwell, as the quotation at the head of the chapter illustrates, by convincing sections of the population of the correctness of the Socialist argument. In *Wigan Pier*, however, Orwell remains critical of the failure of Socialist writers to convey that argument, let alone to do so convincingly. He asserts that

[t]he real Socialist writers, the propagandist writers, have all been dull, empty windbags: Shaw, Barbusse, Upton Sinclair, William Morris, Waldo Frank, etc etc.⁷

The same pessimism informs 'Boys' Weeklies', published three years later. In that essay he argues that the right-wing boys' weeklies such as *Magnet* and *Gem* do not so much have the best tunes, as the only

ones. In contrast he notes sadly that 'a paper with a "left" slant and at the same time likely to have appeal to ordinary boys in their teens is something almost beyond hoping for'.⁸ Both *Wigan Pier* and 'Boys' Weeklies' indicate an awareness not only of the crucial role of the writer (something dealt with in the next chapter) but the necessity of transforming arcane theory into accessible literature. In a sense, Orwell proposes the need for a broad-based, active public sphere, if Socialism is to reach those it ostensibly supports.

Orwell's arguments for Socialism do not simply highlight the failure of certain writers to spread the good word. In 'My Country Right or Left' published in *Folio of New Writing* in 1940, he puts the case for the fusion of seemingly incompatible elements: Socialism and patriotism. If, for Dr. Johnson, patriotism was 'the last refuge of a scoundrel', for Orwell during the war it remains an essential if unrecognised ingredient of revolutionary activity and success. 'My Country Right or Left' marks something of a watershed in his publicly stated position, and its assumptions certainly pose problems. The 'possibility of building a Socialist on the bones of a Blimp' seems a project worthy of Victor Frankenstein. Yet, in each of the 1941 essays dealing with Socialism, patriotism lies at the heart of the argument for revolution. Each essay contains distinct nuances, but the general point can be summed up by quoting from the exhortatory finale of 'The Lion and The Unicorn', in which Orwell writes

By revolution we become more ourselves, not less . . . Nothing ever stands still. We must add to our heritage or lose it, we must grow greater or less, we must go forward or go backward. I believe in England, and I believe that we shall go forward.⁹

The sense of destiny and optimism displayed here fits well with the Utopian future conjured up in the third quotation at the head of the chapter. The quotation comes from the essay 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', published in the *Left News* only two months after 'The Lion and The Unicorn'. A society in which 'men are governed by love and curiosity' appears so seductive that the reader may suspect the writer of being deluded. With Orwell, however, the enticing carrot never hides the enforcing stick for long. He continues that Socialism

is not in itself the final objective, and I think we ought to guard against assuming that *as a system to live under* it will be greatly preferable to democratic capitalism.¹⁰

The fact that the two quotations can come from the same essay registers the complexities of Orwell's conception of Socialism. This chapter explores those complexities.

Orwell should not be seen to be unique in changing his stance, however, and the chapter charts the political readjustments of Orwell's sometime political adversary and publisher, Victor Gollancz. While Gollancz championed a more overtly radical position than Orwell in the late thirties, the war forced a change of stance. Eventually, Orwell, Gollancz and another erstwhile radical, John Strachey, would appear together within the covers of *The Betrayal of the Left*; strange bedfellows they.

'The Spike'

None of this could have been predicted when *The Adelphi* published 'The Spike', by Eric Blair, in April 1931.¹¹ In fact, a version of the essay had been submitted eighteen months before, while Blair was trying to forge himself into a writer in Paris.¹² 'The Spike' cannot be considered as an essay in favour of socialism; rather, it provides a vivid sketch of a stay in a tramps' hostel. As such, it differs from 'A Hanging', published in *The Adelphi* four months later. The latter essay clearly argues a case: capital punishment is reprehensible. 'The Spike' merely portrays a world of social deprivation which would both repel and attract the centre-left readers of *The Adelphi*.

Portrait is an inadequate term for the essay, however, for in 'The Spike' smell, tastes and sounds are also conveyed. Of particular importance, given the discussion of the eye-witness perspective in previous chapters, is the manner in which the narrator moves inside and outside the group of tramps initially gathered outside the hostel:

It was late afternoon. Forty-nine of us, forty-eight men and one woman, lay on the green waiting for the spike to open. We were too tired to talk much. We just sprawled out exhaustedly, with home-made cigarettes sticking out of our scrubby faces.¹³

A sense of homogeneity and camaraderie is conveyed in these opening images. This extends even to the narrator indulging in (what in hindsight is clearly artificial) 'working class' speech, describing how 'when you

came to be searched by [the hostel warden] he fair held you upside down and shook you'.¹⁴ Lord, love a duck.

Yet this image of forty-nine tramps all similarly down at heel and (the woman aside, presumably) all scrubby-faced, is shattered when the narrator comes to be inspected by the warden, who enquires:

'You are a gentleman?'

'I suppose so,' I said.

He gave me another long look. 'Well, that's too bloody bad guv'nor,' he said, 'that's bloody bad luck, that is.' And thereafter he took it into his head to treat me with compassion, even with a kind of respect.¹⁵

Thereafter, also, the perceptions which form the bulk of 'The Spike' are those of an outsider. This is signalled most obviously by the repeatedly expressed disgust at dirt and grime. Whereas the genuine tramp would accept (or ignore) filthy baths, unappetising food and uncomfortable beds, seeing them as preferable to a night under a hedge, the narrator's thin skin repeatedly proves sensitive to the physical privations.

This does not mean that conditions are less than vile: cold, damp, hunger and boredom fill up the short narrative of the essay. 'The Spike' functions as a catalogue of mean poverty, only occasionally leavened by a dash of humanity. The essay ends with one such act, from a tramp who has borrowed fag ends from the narrator. The tramp catches up with the narrator and his companion, Nobby, who have set off for Croydon. The tang of adventure is soured, however, when the third tramp, possibly following some ancient ethical code, puts 'four sodden, debauched, loathly cigarettes into [the narrator's] hands'.¹⁶ For the genuine tramp, such courtesy and generosity presumably would warrant thanks, but the narrator's disgust needs no underlining.

The reaction would likely be the same for the socially-concerned, but mostly middle-class readers of *The Adelphi*. For them, 'The Spike' gives a brief glimpse of the miserable lives of social outcasts, from the point of view of one who, like them, remains inexorably 'inside' society. The signals for this, most obviously the physical repugnance the narrator has for the surroundings (though not the tramps themselves) equate with those of the liberal readers of the periodical. While this gives the essay a degree of vividness, it confines 'The Spike' to superficiality. Where its near-contemporary, 'A Hanging', details psychological and philosophical development, 'The Spike' remains at the level of physical reaction.

A Note on *The Road To Wigan Pier*

The same cannot be said of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, published five years later. Admittedly, the first part of the book can be considered the high water mark for Orwell's use of the eye-witness perspective. In it Orwell presents an uncompromisingly bleak record of working and living conditions for workers in Lancashire and Yorkshire. That section of the book drew critical praise from many quarters: writing in *Left News*, Harold Laski considered the value of this part of the book 'the kind of value we get from Dickens' *Hard Times*, or from the novels of Zola and Balzac'.¹⁷ Arthur Calder-Marshall declared in *Time and Tide* that 'Mr. Orwell is detached. He writes what he has seen. He does not exaggerate'.¹⁸ The *Left Review* included *The Road to Wigan Pier* amongst its 'Books for 1937'.¹⁹

Orwell's insistence in seeing conditions in the North for himself won him the approval of the left-wing novelist Storm Jameson in her forceful essay, 'Documents', which appeared in the July 1937 number of *Fact*.²⁰ A six-penny Left monthly which concentrated on political questions, *Fact* occasionally dabbled in the mysterious world of literature. In 'Documents', Jameson argues that socialist literature needs 'the detailed and accurate presentment, rather than the representation, of this moment, of this society'.²¹ This she considers '[a] task of the greatest value, urgent and not easy George Orwell has begun on it in the first half of *The Road To Wigan Pier*'.²² She urges writers not merely to see for themselves the conditions they later present; it 'is necessary that a writer should have lived with these things for him [sic] to record them simply and coldly'.²³ She considers such writing 'a literary equivalent of the documentary film'.²⁴

The key aspects of the documentary which Jameson sees as relevant are impersonality and accuracy: the two are interlinked. She writes that

[t]he first thing a socialist writer has to realize is that there is no value in the emotions, the spiritual writhings, started in him by the sight, smell and touch of poverty. The emotions are no doubt unavoidable. There is no need to record them. Let him go and pour them down the drain.²⁵

Only after having exorcised the demons of personality can the writer proceed to record accurately. Jameson advises that '[a]s a photographer

does, so must the writer keep himself [sic] out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the *fact* from a striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle'.²⁶ Yet the striking thing about the conception of impersonal accuracy in these arguments is that it is self-contradictory. The clinical, pseudo-scientific approach required by Jameson cannot sustain the call to 'present' facts from a 'striking' angle. If the photographic metaphor holds good, Jameson appears unaware that, in selecting that angle, the photographer creates as much as records reality. The use of adjectives like poignant and ironic hardly suggests impersonality, nor the sound of emotion being poured down the drain.

In contrast, and despite Jameson's commendation of *The Road To Wigan Pier*, Orwell explicitly integrates autobiography into the argument of the book. This personal aspect has two components: Orwell's argument (of which Jameson would approve) that in order to argue for Socialism, he needed to see the injustices of capitalism; and, the audience Orwell addresses in *Wigan Pier*. The book ends with the exhortation to

the private schoolmaster, the half-starved free-lance journalist, the colonel's spinster daughter with £75 a year, the jobless Cambridge graduate, the ship's officer without a ship, the clerks, the civil servants, the commercial travellers and the thrice bankrupt drapers in the country towns – [who] may sink without further struggles into the working class where we belong, and probably when we get there it will not be so dreadful as we feared, for, after all, we have nothing to lose but our aitches.²⁷

A poor man's 'Crispin Crispian' speech, the mock-heroic final words of *Wigan Pier* underline Orwell's sincere argument: the middle-class has a pivotal role to play in the success of Socialism in Britain.

The impact of the Spanish Civil War on Orwell was dealt with in Chapter Three. Of concern here, however, is Orwell's oft-quoted revelation to Cyril Connolly in a letter from a Spanish hospital that 'I have seen wonderful things & at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before'.²⁸ How can this be squared with the apparent argument for Socialism in *The Road To Wigan Pier*? Quite simply, as Orwell argues in *Spilling the Spanish Beans*, a Socialist revolution had occurred in Spain. What Orwell records in *Homage To Catalonia* is the crushing of that revolution. He returned to a Britain, however, securely in the grasp of conservative rule.

A large, impoverished and potentially militant working class existed, as he had seen for himself in the course of researching *Wigan Pier*. Yet the middle class, a crucial class in Orwell's conception of Socialism, clung tenaciously to their aitches. Certain preconditions for a British variety of Socialism were unfulfilled in the Britain of 1937; Socialism had still to be argued for. Orwell found allies for arguments in the I.L.P.

'Why I Join the I.L.P.'

'Why I Join the I.L.P.' appeared in a *New Leader* forever struggling to survive; much the same can be said of the I.L.P. For all its exuberance and idealism, the party's membership in 1935 numbered less than 5,000.²⁹ In real terms, the I.L.P. was politically insignificant in the late thirties. Perhaps because of this practical impotence, the *New Leader* continued to attack its enemies as vigorously as it defended its principles. The paper's very existence was the best and certainly the most public evidence of the party's ideological struggle. Indeed, the reason for such testimonies as Orwell's 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' stems from the need to advertise the conversions of non-believers to the I.L.P. creed. This not only reinforced the belief in the correctness of I.L.P. doctrine, but it also signalled the growth of the party as a political force.

Orwell's was not the first of these testimonies: as far back as 1934 a 'London Tram Conductor', William B. Angier, had explained to readers why he had joined the party, also under the title, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.'³⁰ Articles in the paper repeatedly attempted to woo potential members: Fenner Brockway's February 1938 piece, 'Your Place is in the I.L.P.', declares

The I.L.P. is clearly the unit of organisation to which Revolutionary-Socialists should rally. It has a revolutionary policy and membership. If you want working class unity on a basis that will guarantee the continuance of the Class struggle, your place is in the I.L.P.³¹

When exhortations such as these were successful, the results were publicised quickly. In June of 1938 the *New Leader* began a series of 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' testimonies: 'N.S.' from Manchester; Rudolph Messel eleven days later; Orwell a week after that; F.A. Ridley at the beginning of July; five individuals a week later.³²

Orwell's 'Why I Join' piece is listed as being by the 'Author of *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*'; his latest books, admittedly, but also works more likely than his novels to recommend him to the readers of the *New Leader*. Within the essay itself, in fact, Orwell fudges the character of his output as a writer. He states that '[f]or some years past I have managed to make the capitalist class pay me several pounds a week for writing books against capitalism';³³ a rather grandiose claim, and certainly a misleading interpretation of *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*. Later in the essay he rather downplays the importance of writing, considering that

at a moment like the present the writing of books is not enough. The tempo of events is quickening; the dangers which once seemed a generation distant are staring us in the face. One has got to be actively a Socialist, not merely sympathetic to Socialism, or one plays into the hands of our always-active enemies.³⁴

Naturally, given the audience for – and the motivation behind – the essay, Orwell need not detail his arguments for I.L.P.-style Socialism. In the first part of the essay he does not argue for a particular brand of Socialism at all, but for the ideology *per se*. Acknowledging from the first that he is a writer, Orwell argues that for him the greatest threat consists of the end of free speech. Predicting the threat of this in Britain, he contends that 'the only régime which, in the long run, will dare to permit freedom of speech is a Socialist régime'.³⁵ As in other essays, Orwell defines his position by employing negatives; Socialism's attraction lies not so much that it will build a better society, but in the fact that it will not allow the end of free speech. He emphasises the highly personal aspect of this function of Socialism in commenting that

[i]f Fascism triumphs I am finished as a writer – that is to say, finished in my only effective capacity. That of itself would be sufficient reason for joining a Socialist party.³⁶

The personal aspect evident in this first section fits in with the requirement of personal testimony inherent in the 'Why I Join' series. Orwell's position as a writer need not be held against him; in fact, the conversion of one of the intelligentsia would enhance the prestige of the I.L.P. Tellingly, however, by this stage in the essay Orwell has not differentiated between Socialist parties; any would appear to be acceptable.

Orwell's justification for selecting the I.L.P. as the Socialist party to join does not come until the middle of the essay. At that point he argues for the I.L.P. as the 'only British party – at any rate the only one large enough to be worth considering – which aims at anything I should regard as Socialism'.³⁷ The qualifications undercut what should be a ringing endorsement of the I.L.P. Indeed, Orwell includes within this section the blunt confession that his membership of the I.L.P. does 'not mean that I have lost all faith in the Labour Party. My earnest hope is that the Labour Party will win a clear majority in the next General Election';³⁸ hardly a welcome admission when joining a rival party. The argument that the I.L.P. only aims at something Orwell would regard as Socialism damns with faint praise. In essence, Orwell builds into his acceptance of the party line a fall-back position from which to defend his own view of Socialism should the party itself prove inadequate. Yet, despite the advertised individualism, the essay as a whole is founded on the realisation of the weakness of the solitary fighter, the limited reserves of the individual against 'our always-active enemies'.

Who might those enemies be? Superficially, they would be the Fascists foregrounded as enemies of free speech in the first part of the essay. Yet Orwell also warns that though he has been able to write books against capitalism, 'I do not delude myself that this state of affairs is going to last forever'.³⁹ Capitalists, therefore, can be added to the enemy list. The lack of specification of the 'dangers which once seemed a generation distant' suggest large, malevolent forces. Late in the essay Orwell enlarges on these forces in claiming the I.L.P. as the only party

likely to take the right line against imperialist war or against Fascism when it occurs in its British form. And meanwhile the I.L.P. . . . is systematically libelled from several quarters.⁴⁰

The inclusion of imperialists and British Fascists to the list of enemies comes as no surprise, but the ambiguous claim of systematic libelling calls for some explanation. In the context of the continual wrangling between the *New Leader* and the *Daily Worker*, the accused parties seem clear. Orwell points the finger at 'certain quarters', nevertheless, signalling wider culpability. One need only remember the attacks on both the P.O.U.M. and the *New Leader* during the Spanish Civil War by such papers as *The New Statesman and Nation* and *Time and Tide* to recognise the scope of Orwell's attack; he is including the left-wing press. Readers of the *New Leader* would have been in no doubt as to Orwell's targets. A

recognition of those targets suggests a wider meaning for Orwell's gloomy prediction of the 'end of free speech'. The threat comes not only from the obvious external source, Fascism, but from the ostensibly progressive sections of the British press. All are implicated in the constriction of public debate.

Soon after the publication of 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' Orwell left the sanatorium he had recuperated in since March and set sail for Morocco. Given the focus of this chapter, several of his letters from Marrakech deserve attention. In two letters to Herbert Read, Orwell proposes the setting up of a clandestine press. In the first letter, written in January 1939, Orwell notes that '[a]t present there is considerable freedom of the press . . . I don't believe this state of affairs is going to continue';⁴¹ shades of the argument in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' He suggests to Read the need to accumulate 'the things we should need for the production of pamphlets'.⁴²

Orwell's suggestion to Read might be slightly premature if not a little paranoid, though in the light of the fears expressed in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' the suggestion can be taken as sincere. Orwell reiterates the need for a clandestine press in a letter to Read written in March. From Orwell's apologetic and rather stumbling comment in the second letter ('I quite agree that it's in a way absurd to start preparing for an underground campaign unless you know who is going to campaign and what for'⁴³) Read must have been sceptical about Orwell's ideas. Even so, Orwell persists in arguing that if 'we laid in printing presses etc. in some discreet place . . . we could then feel "Well if trouble does come we are ready"'.⁴⁴ He also volunteers to help with *Revolt*, a short-lived periodical which 'aimed at presenting the Spanish Civil War from the Anarchist viewpoint'.⁴⁵ Perhaps referring to *Revolt*, he urges the necessity of keeping 'a left-wing but non-Stalinist review in existence'.⁴⁶

Orwell's suggestions to Read register the crucial importance he (Orwell) placed in the freedom to print material not only in support of his own brand of Socialism, but also against rivals of Left and Right. Indeed, as the letters and 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' show, the freedom of the periodical and pamphlet press to function operates for Orwell as an index of the struggle against totalitarianism. The rather desperate hope of keeping a 'non-Stalinist review in existence' suggests Orwell's perception of the perilous future for independent left-wing thought. Leaving aside the ideological and emotional pulls of Socialism, Orwell considers it a vital task to protect the ability of the independent thinkers to publicise their views. In Habermas's terms, Orwell argues for an open

public sphere. Against castor oil and the rubber truncheon, Orwell champions the printing press and the periodical.

'Democracy in the British Army'

Despite its inclusion in *CEJL*, 'Democracy in the British Army' has been ignored by critics. The neglect is odd, since the essay was published in *Left Forum* the very month that the Second World War began. Given the clear change in Orwell's position on imperialism and Socialism once the war had started, 'Democracy in the British Army' appears ideally situated on the temporal border between the two stances. In fact, the essay retains the anti-imperialist war sentiment of 'Not Counting Niggers', reinforcing those sentiments, rather than foreshadowing the argument of 'My Country Right or Left'.

'Democracy in the British Army' appeared in the September 1939 issue of *Left Forum*.⁴⁷ Orwell had written 'Eye-Witness in Barcelona' for the periodical in 1937, though at that time it had gone under the title *Controversy*. In 1939, the possibility of war not surprisingly claimed the greatest share of space in the periodical. One measure of the rapid political developments taking place was the fact that the key issue engaging *Left Forum* readers at the time (the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact) receives no mention in 'Democracy in the British Army'. Presumably, the essay was written before the pact. In fact, much of 'Democracy in the British Army' looks to the distant past, Orwell giving a short history of class stratification in the British army from the time of the Duke of Wellington. The history lesson establishes that 'the British army remains essentially the same machine as it was fifty years ago': reactionary and class-ridden. This is the crux of 'Democracy in the British Army', for Orwell charges that

[a] little while back any Socialist would have admitted this . . . But we happen to be at a moment when the rise of Hitler has scared the official leaders of the Left into an attitude not far removed from jingoism. Large numbers of left-wing publicists are almost openly agitating for war.⁴⁸

The slight qualifications in this accusation ('not far removed from jingoism'; 'almost openly agitating for war') do little to temper its

provocativeness; indeed, they provide the camouflage behind which Orwell can launch his assault. *Left Forum*, remember, was contributed to – and read – by supporters of the Labour Party and the Communist Party; their leaders certainly fall under the label 'official leaders of the Left'. By not naming specific individuals, however, Orwell achieves the effect of a blanket condemnation with little rhetorical effort. The additional snipe at 'left-wing publicists' not only reinforces Orwell repeated attacks upon the distortions of the Left press, but also constitutes a thinly veiled jibe at the Left Book Club and his own publisher, Victor Gollancz.

In 'Not Counting Niggers' Orwell had attacked sections of the Left for turning a blind eye to the iniquities of British imperialism. By contrast, in 'Democracy in the British Army' he attacks the belief that in the expected war, the reactionary, class-ridden army will be transformed: "this time" things are going to be "different". Militarization is not going to mean militarization. Colonel Blimp will no longer be Colonel Blimp'. Instead, Orwell notes, the 'more soft-boiled left-wing papers' urge and expect the 'democratizing of the army'.⁴⁹

In attacking the left press, Orwell once again highlights its ability to manipulate and direct Left opinion. For him, not all the arguments for Socialism in Britain come under the heading of 'intelligent propaganda' he had argued for in *The Road To Wigan Pier*. Some, in fact, hamper the proper understanding of the consequences of left-wing tactics and arguments. Ironically, of course, Orwell's only practical means of countering such manipulation remained periodicals.

Given the lessons of military history delivered in the first part of 'Democracy in the British Army', Orwell is vigorous in his scepticism of the potential for a democratized army. In the later part of the essay he considers what democratizing the army might mean, judging that

if it means anything, [it] means doing away with the predominance of a single class and introducing a less mechanical form of discipline. In the British army this would mean an entire reconstruction which would rob the army of efficiency for five to ten years. Such a process is only doubtfully possible while the British Empire exists, and quite unthinkable while the simultaneous aim is to 'stop Hitler'.⁵⁰

The purpose of Orwell's lesson in military history is clear; the inherited class divisions which give the British army its cohesion cannot and

will not be transformed radically within the time available. Further, in undermining the possibility of 'democratizing' the army, Orwell cuts the ground from under those on the Left whose justification for war against Germany in defence of the Soviet Union rests on the argument that '[m]ilitarization is not going to mean militarization'.⁵¹ Without the transformation of the army, the Left case for supporting war against Germany collapses.

In contrast to this argument, and in line with I.L.P. fears, Orwell predicts an expansion of the army on existing lines. He disparages the idea that new democratic militias, of the type he had fought in during the Spanish Civil War, will signal real change in the makeup of the army hierarchy. Few Socialists, he warns, grasp the fact that 'in England the whole of the bourgeoisie is to some extent militarized'.⁵² Whatever the pretensions towards democracy in the army, the training received by the middle classes in public school give them an advantage over the untrained worker. This advantage makes promotion more likely, thus entrenching bourgeois control. Orwell writes bluntly that '[o]nce the novelty [of conscription] has worn off some method will be devised of keeping proletarians out of positions of command'.⁵³ Not only does the Left belief in democratizing the army increase the possibility of war, but the outcome of conflict will be the imposition of class divisions on the conscripts. In any case, and as Orwell had argued in 'Not Counting Niggers', such a war would in reality merely defend one imperial power against another.

Orwell develops the idea of increasing militarization to encompass the potential for military domination within Britain. Adopting the position that 'what is true within the armed forces is true of the nation as a whole', he contends that 'every increase in the strength of the military machine means more power to the forces of reaction'.⁵⁴ Again, this argument accords with the ideas of the I.L.P. Yet it also repeats a theme running through Orwell's essays on Socialism, that the activities of sections of the British Left have consequences at odds with their alleged aims.

At times, the discrepancy between aims and consequences is the result of naivety, at other times the result of hypocrisy, but in all cases the Left periodical or daily press is involved in the justification of flawed policies and actions. Orwell ends 'Democracy in the British Army' with a broadside against the shortcomings of one section of the Left press, charging that possibly

some of our left-wing jingoes are acting with their eyes open. If they are, they must be aware that the *News Chronicle* version

of 'defence of democracy' leads directly *away* from democracy, even in the narrow nineteenth-century sense of political liberty, independence of the trade unions [sic] and freedom of speech and the press.⁵⁵

Not only is 'freedom of speech and the press' vital to democracy; the self-same press can threaten the democracy it supposedly protects.

Despite the beguiling opening stroll through British military history, 'Democracy in the British Army' constitutes a vigorous attack on large sections of the British Left in general, and support for war against Germany in particular. Along with 'Not Counting Niggers', 'Democracy in the British Army' indicates the extent to which Orwell's political thinking in the lead-up to the Second World War reflects the quasi-Marxist radicalism of the I.L.P. This radicalism tends to be ignored in studies of Orwell, largely as a consequence of Orwell's abrupt realignment of his views on the need for war, the iniquities of British imperialism and the necessity of patriotism once the war began. The war-time position is taken as a kind of destination point, a place where Orwell's views solidify into a prickly but patriotic Socialism.

The attention to a supposed destination, however, ignores the 'journey', the development of ideas in relation to changing situations, or changing perspectives. At the turbulent end of a turbulent decade such changes were to be expected, and indeed required. In his essays, Orwell was able repeatedly and publicly reassess and restate his views. The variety of often contradictory positions he takes up in relatively short periods of time should not be ignored. 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'Democracy in the British Army' deserve attention as indicators of Orwell's views in the months leading up to war. Such attention underlines the radical change in his views as set down in his critically considered wartime essay, 'My Country Right or Left'.

Review of *Mein Kampf*

Before that essay, however, Orwell reviewed *Mein Kampf*, a review which provides some illuminating footnotes to the discussion of his wartime position on Socialism. The review appeared in the *New English Weekly* in March 1940, its most notable feature (in terms of Orwell's views on Socialism) being the analysis of Hitler's strengths. Orwell points out

that Hitler exposes the 'falsity of the hedonistic attitude to life'.⁵⁶ He attributes this attitude to those 'progressive' thinkers who assume 'that human beings desire nothing beyond ease, security and the avoidance of pain. In such a view of life there is no room . . . for patriotism and the military virtues'.⁵⁷ In contrast to this misguided hedonism, Orwell depicts Hitler as recognising that the public

at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty parades. However they may be as economic theories, Fascism and Nazism are psychologically far sounder than any hedonistic conception of lifeWhereas Socialism, and even capitalism . . . have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.⁵⁸

Chapter Two traced the process whereby Orwell's initial moral analysis of imperialism was replaced in the late thirties by a economic understanding, which reintegrated morality. The same process can be seen in terms of Orwell's approach to Socialism: an early approach (though based on psychology rather than morals) is replaced by an economically underpinned model in the late thirties. This in turn is then partly discarded for one which reintegrates psychology. In *The Road To Wigan Pier* Orwell criticised Socialists and Communists who 'with their eyes glued to economic facts, have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul', erecting in its place 'the goal of a materialist Utopia'.⁵⁹ These arguments in *Wigan Pier*, foregrounding mass psychology ahead of economic analysis, echo on in the review of *Mein Kampf*. They can also be heard in 'My Country Right or Left'.

'My Country Right or Left'

As already noted, *CEJL* distorted the sequence of Orwell's writing. Placed at the end of Volume One of that collection, 'My Country Right or Left' appears as a summation of Orwell's views at the end of the thirties, and as his first war-time declaration. In fact, however, the essay was not published in *Folios of New Writing* until the autumn of 1940, by which

time the war had been fought for nearly a year. If simple chronology were followed, the essay would appear at least fifty pages into Volume Two. As a guide to the distortion, a letter in Volume Two of *CEJL* from Orwell to John Lehmann, the editor of *Folios of New Writing*, apologises for not having yet written 'My Country Right or Left'.⁶⁰

Lehmann had resurrected *Folios of New Writing* from the defunct *New Writing*, and he admits that in the early part of the war he assumed that *New Writing*

could scarcely hope to survive: against the bombs, the calling up of writers, the scarcity of paper, the difficulties of transport, and, as much as anything else, the transformation of thought and feeling total warfare would bring with it.⁶¹

Underlining the degree of disruption, *Folios of New Writing* appeared only sporadically through the war.

Like 'Shooting an Elephant', published four years earlier, 'My Country Right or Left' was written as a result of Lehmann's prompting. Lehmann, eager to get the fledgling periodical off the ground, sent letters to Orwell, V.S. Pritchett, William Plomer and others he hoped would contribute new material.⁶² In July 1940, after the first issue of *Folios of New Writing*, Orwell replied apologetically about having 'written nothing for you after promising I would'. Obviously, Lehmann's pressure tactics worked, for 'My Country Right or Left' appears in the second issue of the periodical.

The essay is interesting for a number of reasons: not only does it publicise Orwell's brand of patriotic Socialism, but he employs what is for him an unusual rhetorical device – the revelatory dream. 'My Country Right or Left' begins with a more usual tactic, the undercutting of an established idea. Orwell writes that

[c]ontrary to popular belief, the past was not more eventful than the present. If it seems so it is because when you look backward, things that happened years apart are telescoped together, and because very few of your memories come to you genuinely.⁶³

In 'My Country Right or Left', Orwell foregrounds the ambiguity of perceptions of the past. He focuses on the First World War, arguing that memory distorts the 'reality' of past actions or events. Images of the First World War for those living through the Second World War are

an amalgam of 'books, films and reminiscences'. This rough philosophy of history has more than passing importance, for in 'My Country Right or Left' Orwell examines the interconnection between personal history, the changing perceptions of historical events, and the imprint of history upon individuals and groups.

Much of the first part of 'My Country Right or Left' recounts Orwell's childhood memories of the First World War. Yet the central point of this exercise is to prove the essential triviality of such memories. More importantly, however, Orwell reveals how the war's lack of genuine impact on his own generation engendered a cynical 'pacifist reaction' that outlived the war itself: 'For years after the war, to have any knowledge of or interest in military matters . . . was suspect in "enlightened" circles'.⁶⁴

Despite the initial cynicism and dismissiveness of his generation, he admits that '[a]s the war fell back into the past . . . those who had been "just too young" became conscious of the vastness of the experience they had missed'. To compound the problem for his newly-aware generation, '[y]ou felt yourself a little less of a man, because you had missed it'.⁶⁵ The past, in other words, only becomes comprehensible from a temporal distance. In Orwell's case, that comprehension generates feelings of inadequacy and loss.

Yet, Orwell argues, inadequacy and loss breed expectation, or at least hope, in those who missed out. A future war might allow those too young for the Great War to achieve manhood eventually. Orwell develops this argument for psychological motivation in revealing himself

convinced that part of the reason for the fascination that the Spanish Civil War had for people of about my age was that it was so like the Great War.⁶⁶

Like the Great War it may have seemed, but he admits that the Spanish War was in fact only a 'bad copy of 1914-18'; first hearing artillery in Spain 'was at least partly disappointment. It was so different from the unbroken roar that my senses had been waiting for for twenty years'.⁶⁷

Given the rhetoric of sexual and psychological inadequacy, it seems fair to judge Orwell's first experience of combat in Spain as an anti-climax. Something more fundamental is hinted at, however, for Orwell suggests the emotional or psychological processes at work in his attitude to the Spanish Civil War. While acknowledging that 'only part of the reason' for fighting in Spain was a supposed similarity between it and the First World War, he advances no other reason in 'My Country Right

or Left'. Within the confines of the essay, the emotional or psychological explanation dominates. This supposed emotional basis fits in with the essay's general thrust: that motivating factors exist outside of – and perhaps dominant over – political ideology or rational argument.

In justifying his argument for fighting in the Second World War, Orwell does incorporate a political element. He introduces this, however, through the unusual medium of a revelatory dream. The importance of the dream to the argument of 'My Country Right or Left' is sufficient to warrant a full quotation. Orwell writes that

[f]or several years the coming war had been a nightmare to me, and at times I even made speeches and wrote pamphlets against it. But the night before the Russo-German pact was announced I dreamed that the war had started. It was one of those dreams which, whatever Freudian inner meaning they may have, do sometimes reveal to you the real state of your feelings. It taught me two things, first, that I should be simply relieved when the long-dreaded war started, secondly, that I was patriotic at heart, would not sabotage or act against my own side, would support the war, would fight in it if possible.⁶⁸

Two things about the dream strike home immediately: one, the enormous lesson Orwell takes from it; two, the complete lack of any information about the dream's content. The curiously powerful import of the dream is only enhanced by the fact that supposedly it occurs the night before the announcement of the Russo-German pact. The timing as well as the 'message' of the dream seem almost too good to be true.

The dream performs several important functions, both as a commentary on Orwell's political views and activities, and in terms of the argument of the essay as a whole. Given the time scale defined in 'My Country Right or Left', it marks a moment of transition if not transformation, the dividing line between Orwell's anti-war speeches and pamphlets of the thirties on the one hand, and his acceptance of the need to fight on the other. In effect the dream negates or relegates the importance of his anti-war activities of the late thirties. Orwell almost apologetically admits that 'at times I even made speeches and wrote pamphlets against [war]'. Given the vehemence of 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'Democracy and the British Army', never mind Orwell's membership of the I.L.P., this comment hugely undervalues his efforts and his arguments.

The neutralising effect of the dream is reinforced by its juxtaposition to the nightmare of impending war. The nightmare signals fear, but the dream itself brings relief from that fear, as well as the certainty of an appropriate stance to take. The fact that that stance founds itself upon patriotism reveals the gap Orwell has leapt in the time since the writing of 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'Democracy in the British Army'. Or, to change the metaphor, his review of *Mein Kampf* can be seen as the rhetorical bridge Orwell constructs, crosses, and then sets alight, having arrived on the solid ground of revolutionary patriotism mapped out in 'My Country Right or Left'.

Having established his patriotic credentials by way of the revelatory dream, Orwell then provides (conscious) reasons for supporting war against Fascism:

There is no real alternative between resisting Hitler and surrendering to him, and from a Socialist point of view I should say that it is better to resist; in any case I can see no argument for surrender that does not make nonsense of the Republican resistance in Spain, the Chinese resistance to Japan, etc.etc.[sic]⁶⁹

This makes up all of the rational argument Orwell employs for supporting the war. Yet even this lame political position does not stand for long. Orwell immediately knocking it down by revealing the 'emotional basis' of his actions: 'What I knew in my dream that night was that the long drilling in patriotism the middle classes go through had done its work'.⁷⁰ He confesses not to be able to sabotage an England 'in a serious jam'. A year before, remember, he had considered the Empire England ruled as a 'far vaster injustice' than Fascist Germany.

Though the dream in 'My Country Right or Left' reveals the success of the 'long drilling in patriotism' to Orwell, the concept itself requires rationalising in the conscious world. Orwell boldly takes on what is potentially the most damning political argument against his position, stating that patriotism 'has nothing to do with conservatism'.⁷¹ Instead, he considers it 'devotion to something that is changing but is felt to be mystically the same', exemplifying this by using the supposed devotion 'of the ex-White Bolshevik to Russia'.⁷² This claim, with its curious blend of the language of religion, the emotions, and the occult, hardly defuses the charge that in England (as opposed to on the Russian steppes) patriotism equates with conservatism. The mythical ex-White Bolshevik clearly is meant to fuse in an image the Socialist and the

patriot, though the vagueness of the image does not of itself convince. Ex-White Bolsheviks securely in power in the Kremlin must have been rare birds, furtive and endangered.

Orwell overcomes the shortcomings of his example by employing a technique he used in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.': predicting the future. He develops the quasi-philosophical notion, of something (in this case England) changing but being the same, into a prediction and a warning that '[o]nly revolution can save England'. Orwell forecasts the possibility that a year or two on from 1940

we shall see changes that will surprise the idiots who have no foresight. I dare say the London gutters will have to run with blood. All right, let them, if it is necessary. But when the red militias are billeted in the Ritz I shall still feel that the England I was taught to love so long ago and for such different reasons is somehow persisting.⁷³

That these predictions bare little relation to what happened in the next few years is not of itself important. London's gutters never ran with the blood of revolutionaries, and the Ritz was kept free of red militias. Yet the predictions themselves are less important than the idea of England changing but staying 'mystically' the same.

In keeping with this argument, Orwell reveals that, as a result of childhood training, he feels a 'faint feeling of sacrilege' at not standing during 'God Save The King'.⁷⁴ Like the country itself, Orwell has changed but stayed the same. While recognising his feelings as 'childish', he argues that this is preferable to those 'left-wing intellectuals who are so "enlightened" that they cannot understand the most ordinary emotions'. This constitutes a rather sweeping claim supported by little more than spleen, but it provides the basis for a far more substantial accusation:

It is exactly the people whose hearts have *never* leapt at the sight of the Union Jack who will flinch from revolution when the moment comes.⁷⁵

The charge has all the more bite given the prediction that such a revolution might happen within the next few years. Additionally, the claim concerning the inspirational qualities of the Union Jack interweaves patriotism with the success of revolution. Like the Hitler he perceives

in the pages of *Mein Kampf*, the Orwell of 'My Country Right or Left' knows the value of 'drums, flags and loyalty parades'.

The essay ends with a literary flourish, Orwell drawing parallels between the poetry of two writers of widely divergent political and literary reputation: Sir Henry Newbolt, patriotic balladeer, and author of 'Drake's Drum'; and John Cornford, the paragon of politically committed Left writers of the thirties. Newbolt had lived on to ripe, conservative old age; Cornford had been killed at the age of twenty one while fighting in the Spanish Civil War. The comparison of itself would be enough to inflame the passion of those still cherishing the memory of the brilliant young activist. Orwell goes further, however, comparing Cornford's Spanish Civil War poem 'Before the Storming of Huesca' with Newbolt's 'There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight', coming to the startling conclusion that 'the emotional content of the two poems is almost exactly the same'. From this piece of off-the-cuff comparative literature, Orwell declares that '[t]he young Communist [Cornford] who died heroically in the International Brigade was public school to the core'.⁷⁶

As a judgement on Cornford, a writer who had warned of the 'very dangerous attempt to deck out the old class in new revolutionary-utopian trappings', Orwell's statement requires something more substantial than a quick comparison of poems. Yet Cornford's alleged public school core provides a means to the rhetorical question which acts as a spring-board for the final assertion of this assertion-laden essay:

What does this prove? Merely the possibility of building a Socialist on the bones of a Blimp, the power of one kind of loyalty to transmute into another, the spiritual need for patriotism and the military virtues, for which, however little the boiled rabbits of the Left may like them, no substitute has yet been found.⁷⁷

Admittedly, the reading of Cornford's poem that provides the foundation upon which Orwell constructs these assertions is fairly insubstantial. Of itself, it hardly constitutes 'proof' of the need for patriotism and the military virtues, or the blanket vilification of the unnamed 'boiled rabbits of the Left'. Indeed, what gives the essay the impetus for the final impassioned attack is the sheer tendentiousness of the composite parts. Examined separately, they carry less conviction than as a unit: can the 'possibility of building a Blimp on the bones of a Socialist' be taken seriously? does Cornford's poem illustrate the

transmutation of loyalty? is there a spiritual need for patriotism and the military virtues? can no substitute for these be found? All the questions can be asked, but the essay form allows Orwell to dodge the need to provide answers. Instead, like some huge snowball, the assertions in 'My Country Right or Left' increasingly gather rhetorical speed as they hurtle at the reader. These assertions can be resisted, but nevertheless their impact will be felt.

'My Country Right or Left' marks a clean break from the I.L.P.-influenced polemics 'Not Counting Niggers' and 'Democracy in the British Army'. In fact, Orwell can be seen contradicting his earlier arguments, and even adopting the same positions he reproached in those earlier essays. For instance, in 'Not Counting Niggers' he had attacked those on the Left who had differentiated between Britain and Nazi Germany. Orwell had argued (well into 1939) that the British Empire was 'a far vaster injustice' than its German counterpart and that, in not accepting this, left wing politics in Britain was 'partly humbug'. In 'Democracy in the British Army', published almost literally on the eve of war, he damned 'left-wing jingoes' who argued that in the predicted war '[m]ilitarization is not going to mean militarization' and that 'Colonel Blimp is no longer Colonel Blimp'. The good colonel provides the skeleton for the embryonic Socialist in 'My Country Right or Left', while jingoism (slightly tarted up as patriotism) provides the enlivening spark. Militarism, which in 'Democracy in the British Army' meant 'more power for the forces of reaction', by the time of 'My Country Right or Left' has been transformed into a 'virtue'.

Orwell and Gollancz: A Comparison

Orwell's change in stance should not be written off, however, as mere revisionism; rapidly changing circumstances necessitated what were often dramatic realignments. His withdrawal from the I.L.P. early in the war testifies to his desire to assess his own position rather than to adopt the answers of a political party which required ideological consistency. Nor was he alone on the Left in changing his position once war had been declared. A comparable figure was Orwell's main publisher, Victor Gollancz. Gollancz had supported much which Orwell had derided through the thirties: the various incarnations of the 'Peace Front'; the Soviet Union; the Communist Party of Great Britain. Orwell had even parodied Gollancz's Left Book Club in *Coming Up For Air*. Through his

publishing house generally, but especially via the conduit of the Left Book Club, Gollancz was able to obtain the large scale dissemination of views with which he agreed. At the same time, of course, it was possible for him to refuse to print ideas he did not accept, instanced in Orwell's case by *Homage To Catalonia* and (later) by *Animal Farm*. In the late thirties, however, Gollancz's suspicion of Communist subversion of the Left Book Club, coupled with a political reassessment after the Munich Crisis, led him slowly to a change of heart.

A signal of the change in Gollancz's stance comes in 'Thoughts After Munich', his editorial in the November 1938 issue of *Left News*. In this, Gollancz claims that the original purpose of the Club had been to educate readers, with the lofty goals of 'the preservation of peace, and the creation of a juster social order'.⁷⁸ He confesses, however, to something that seems hardly startling given these goals: education might take a back seat to propaganda. Gollancz admits that

[p]assionately believing in certain ideas, I have allowed myself . . . to become too much of a propagandist and too little of an educator . . . only by the *clash* of ideas does a mind truly become free . . . in my view the publications of the Club tended to concentrate to too great a degree (though by no means exclusively) on two or three points of view.⁷⁹

The arrogant sense of himself as an educator can be put down to Gollancz's healthy (indeed, robust) sense of his self worth. The qualification that the Club 'by no means exclusively' restricted other views points to a rather desperate need for self-justification. Nevertheless, Gollancz's admissions in 'Thoughts After Munich' bespeak a break with his past ideas. Ironically, in arguing for the illuminating clash of ideas, Gollancz could be seen as promoting the need for an active public sphere.

Gollancz's political change of heart filtered into his Left Book Club activities. At the end of 1940, he suggested that the club be renamed 'The League for Victory and Progress'. His increasing anxiety over the Communist activity in Britain, made plain in the *Left News* essay, 'The C[ommunist] P[arty], Revolutionary Defeatism, and the "People's Convention"', was emphasised the searing attack on the Party in *The Betrayal of the Left*. This book contained a contribution from his co-selector in the Club, John Strachey. Like Gollancz, Strachey made major political readjustments once the war had started. One of the most influential of Britain's younger Left intellectuals in the

thirties, he had championed the causes of radical Socialism and the Soviet Union through the decade. Unlike Gollancz, Strachey retained his antagonism to imperialist war after the start of the Second World War. In 'The War', a *Left News* article published in December 1939, Strachey argues against support for the British government, reckoning that '[t]he way out [of war] lies through the struggle of the people of Britain, France and Germany, and of the people of every other Imperialist power, against their own governments'.⁸⁰

By January 1941 Strachey's position had changed noticeably. In the same issue of the *Left News* in which Gollancz's attack on 'revolutionary defeatism' appeared, Strachey contributes 'Totalitarianism', which drew parallels between Fascism and Soviet Communism.⁸¹ Like Gollancz's essay, 'Totalitarianism' was included in *The Betrayal of the Left*. In fact, another essay from the same *Left News* won selection into the book; Orwell's 'Our Opportunity'. To underline the agreement of stance between the three writers, Gollancz includes a note stating that

[t]hough not planned as such, the three articles in this issue by myself, Strachey, and Orwell may well be read – in that order – as a unity.⁸²

'Our Opportunity'

The title of 'Our Opportunity' refers, in fact, to two opportunities: one missed, the other still only a potentiality. Orwell considers that, in the immediate aftermath of the retreat from Dunkirk, '[h]ad real leadership existed on the Left . . . [it] could have been the beginning of the end of British capitalism'.⁸³ Even so, an opportunity still presents itself, he argues, in the potential for another crisis:

At that moment it may be decided once and for all whether the issues of this war are to be made clear and who is to control the great middling mass of people, working class and middle class, who are capable of being pushed in either one direction or the other.⁸⁴

The binding agent of this middling mass and, for Orwell, the key motivating force for a successful war and a successful revolution, is one and the same thing: patriotism.

In *The Betrayal of the Left*, the title of 'Our Opportunity' is changed to 'Patriots and Revolutionaries'; the latter title conveys more fully the

argumentative thrust of the essay. The combination of patriotism and revolution, two elements that might on the surface appear antipathetic, echoes the call for the fusing of Socialist and Blimp in 'My Country Right or Left'. 'Our Opportunity' develops this argument, though in a more overtly political way. In part, the differences of approach in the two essays can be explained by the nature of the respective periodicals in which they appear. *Folios of New Writing's* literary-cultural bent suited Orwell's use of two writers (Cornford and Newbolt) to substantiate his major argument. In the more openly political *Left News*, such a tactic would have been counterproductive. Orwell's focus in 'Our Opportunity' is aimed firmly on the political argument.

Whereas in 'My Country Right or Left' Orwell founds his argument for patriotic Socialism on the lessons of his own dream, in 'Our Opportunity' he discerns an almost universal patriotism in the middling masses. Criticising the Left leadership for its indecision at the time of Dunkirk, Orwell judges that at that moment

the willingness for sacrifice and drastic changes extended not only to the working class but to nearly the whole of the middle class, whose patriotism, when it comes to the pinch, is stronger than their sense of self-interest.⁸⁵

As well as teaching hard military lessons, in Orwell's view Dunkirk revealed the crucial fact that 'the common people were patriotic'. He uses this perception as the basis for his call for the Left not only to understand the power of patriotism, but to harness that power for revolution.

Revolution, patriotism, and victory in the war against Hitler are interwoven in Orwell's conception of the situation faced in Britain. He recognises that in the early days of the war '[t]he notion that *England can only win the war by passing through revolution* had barely been mooted', but argues that the disasters of mid-1940 changed the situation.⁸⁶ The patriotism then shown by the working class, especially, resulted in 'a huge effort to increase armaments production and prevent invasion'.⁸⁷ At the same time, the recruitment of huge numbers of soldiers in the Home Guard revealed a mass desire to defend England. Crucially, however, the defence of England did not mean the defence of the country as it stood, but rather as it might be. Orwell judges there to be a general perception that people have a 'duty both to defend England and to turn it into a genuine democracy'.⁸⁸

The preceding argument approximates Orwell's championing, in 'My Country Right or Left', of an England changing, but 'mystically the same'.

In 'Our Opportunity', though, Orwell employs more overtly political language, suggesting that

the feeling of all true patriots and all true Socialists is at bottom reducible to the 'Trotskyist' slogan: "The war and the revolution are inseparable". We cannot beat Hitler without passing through revolution, nor consolidate our revolution without beating Hitler.⁸⁹

Orwell sees no third option: either England is transformed into a 'Socialist democracy', or it is subsumed within the 'Nazi empire'. Neither of the two alternatives is vouchsafed; the middling mass might or might not grab the opportunity the next crisis offers. They will only take the opportunity, however, if their patriotism is channelled properly.

Orwell realises that his argument for revolutionary patriotism rests on several debatable notions, most notably that middle class patriotism will override self-interest 'when it comes to the pinch'. He had argued for the importance of the middle class for Socialism in *The Road To Wigan Pier*, but there the call went out to that group themselves to lose their aitches. Five years later, in 'Our Opportunity', Orwell acknowledges that what he calls 'British extremist parties' have declared the winning over of the middle classes 'unnecessary and impossible'.⁹⁰ By their own actions, the middle class would appear to agree with the extremists.

Orwell nevertheless takes the pragmatic view, that the middle class contains 'practically the whole of the technocracy . . . without which a modern industrial country could not last for a week'.⁹¹ Without the co-operation of this group, any Socialist revolution (as Orwell envisages it) must fail. He asks rhetorically whether it would be possible to convert the airman or the naval officer into a 'convinced Socialist'. He answers that it matters not so much whether the middle class might support a Socialist revolution, as whether they would sabotage it. Orwell trusts in the power of patriotism to stay the saboteur's hand, arguing that

We have got to make far clearer than it has been made hitherto the fact that at this moment of time a revolutionary has to be a patriot, and a patriot has to be a revolutionary. 'Do you want to defeat Hitler? Then you must be ready to sacrifice your social prestige. Do you want to establish Socialism? Then you must be ready to defend your country' . . . [A]long these lines our propaganda must move.⁹²

Whether this represents the intelligent propaganda Orwell had called for in *The Road To Wigan Pier* remains moot.

In 'Our Opportunity', Orwell does not simply call for the integration of the middle class in Socialist plans. He recognises the efforts, aspirations, and revolutionary potential of the working class. Yet he perceives these aspects as driven by an instinctive patriotism. He illustrates his point late in the essay by recalling such slogans as 'Poor, but loyal' chalked on the walls of London slums in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of George V; the slogan 'Landlords keep away' adorns the same walls. Acknowledging that the writers of such slogans have a misguided sense of where political power lies, Orwell takes the slogans as proof of his central point, that the slum dwellers

were patriotic, but they were not Conservative. And did they not show a sounder instinct than those who tell us that patriotism is something disgraceful and national liberty a matter of indifference?⁹³

The question illustrates a number of oppositions: between the nobly poor slum dwellers, and the menacingly amorphous 'those' who pillory patriotism; between soundness on the one hand, and disgrace and indifference on the other; between personal instinct and hectoring doctrine ('those who tell us'); between patriotism and disgrace; between national liberty and indifference. In Orwell's mind, there exists a fundamental dichotomy between a sound, instinctual, patriotic working class, and a shadowy, haranguing group falsely attributing negative attributes to patriotism and liberty.

The fusing of national liberty and patriotism provides Orwell with the rhetorical momentum for the question with which 'Our Opportunity' ends. He asks:

Although the circumstances were far more dramatic, was [patriotism] not the same impulse that moved the Paris workers in 1793, the Communards in 1871, the Madrid trade unionists in 1936 – the impulse to defend one's country, and to make it a place worth living in?⁹⁴

The historical episodes Orwell cites are examples of internal conflict rather than the defence of a nation from external threat. Even so, the three unimpeachable historical cases co-opted into this argument

buttress Orwell's general point: that progressive forces do (indeed, must) defend their nation, as well as overthrowing reactionary powers. Orwell builds into the question the ideas of conservation (national defence) and changing (making the nation worth living in). In other words, if his argument holds true, the progressive heroes of Paris and Spain carried with them a sense of defending something that was changing, while staying 'mystically the same'.

'Our Opportunity' develops the argument for patriotic Socialism first spelt out in 'My Country Right or Left'. The later essay has a harder political edge than the earlier piece: instead of draping itself in the nostalgia of 'My Country Right or Left', 'Our Opportunity' faces towards the future. What that future might be remains undetermined, and 'Our Opportunity' functions as a rallying cry rather than a plan of action. In fact, the essay provoked one reader to request fuller details of what that future supposedly entailed. Orwell replied with another *Left News* piece, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', which will be analysed shortly. Before that essay's publication, however, Orwell produced his major wartime essay on Socialism, 'The Lion and The Unicorn'.

The Public Sphere in War-time

'The Lion and The Unicorn' was part of an attempt to publish polemical views in an accessible format. The essay was the first of the Searchlight Books edited by Orwell and Tosco Fyvel. Initially suggested by Fyvel in 1940, the series was published through 1941 and 1942 by Martin Secker and Warburg at a price of two shillings per copy.⁹⁵ The overt purpose of the series can be gauged from the initial advertisement which stresses that

the aim of SEARCHLIGHT BOOKS [is] to do all in their power to criticise and kill what is rotten in Western civilisation and supply constructive ideas for the difficult period ahead. The books will be written in simple language without the rubber-stamp political jargon of the past.⁹⁶

An ambitious undertaking, though one which bears clear traces of Orwell's 1937 call for 'intelligent propaganda'. Frederic Warburg was later to recall that 'Fyvel's idea was for a series of little books . . . written by a group of men who had the ability to visualise a new and saner Britain

when the war was won'.⁹⁷ The idea of a connected series of short, cheap polemics aimed at the popular market marks an attempt to encourage debate; in a sense, to expand the boundaries of the public sphere.

The Searchlight series was not the first of its kind. As far back as 1937, 'Penguin Specials' had been initiated to publish topical books quickly. Partly perhaps because they cost only sixpence, by 1939 'almost every political Special sold 100,000 [copies] in a matter of weeks and the most successful achieved a phenomenal quarter of a million sales in less than four weeks'.⁹⁸ The Specials continued to be published through the war, and drew writers from across the political spectrum: the Soviet sympathiser and Labour M.P. D.N.Pritt, for example, produced the duet *Light on Moscow* and *Must the War Spread?*; the Liberal M.P. Sir Richard Acland's *Unser Kampf*, by contrast, argued the need for common ownership in Britain and a new international order.

Another publisher to start up a series of cheap topical polemics was (not surprisingly) Victor Gollancz. The war had signalled the start of the slow decline of Gollancz's Left Book Club, but the fantastic success of *Guilty Men*, a withering satire on the duplicity of British rulers in the thirties, suggested the possibility of a series of similarly polemical pieces. *Guilty Men* would eventually go through forty three impressions and sell nearly 220,000 copies, causing Gollancz to begin the rapid publication of the 'Victory Books' series.⁹⁹ These would include such successes as *The Trial of Mussolini* (a fictitious court room drama in which Mussolini is put on trial by British leaders who had at various times supported him) and *Your M.P.* (which exposed the appeasers amongst British politicians); sales exceeded 150,000, and 200,000 respectively.¹⁰⁰

While these works fulfilled the first part of the 'Searchlight Books' brief (to 'criticise and kill what is rotten') they were less successful in supplying 'constructive ideas for the difficult period ahead'. Nevertheless, and despite the privations brought on by war, public debate was enlivened by the short polemics published, Orwell's own work included. The impressive sales of these works, in a period of financial as well as physical upheaval, suggest a public made aware of the possibility of participating in debates over present states of affairs and the post-war future. Yet one fact should not be ignored: the majority of those who published their opinions, and those who did the publishing, came from a very small social group. Even given their ideological differences, Fyvel, Acland, Gollancz, Warburg, Pritt and (despite his best efforts) Orwell all come from sections of the enlightened bourgeoisie Habermas associates with control of the public sphere.

'The Lion and The Unicorn'

'The Lion and The Unicorn' comprises three parts: 'England Your England'; 'Shopkeepers at War'; and 'The English Revolution'. These parts are in turn broken into eleven sub-sections. The format allows Orwell to range freely over a wide territory, while retaining a degree of unity. Some sense of this unity can be gauged from the titles to the respective sub-sections, each of which signals England as a connecting thread through the weave of the whole essay. Not surprisingly, therefore, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' begins and ends with an acknowledgement of the importance of patriotism. In the first instance, however, the patriots consist of 'highly civilised human beings, flying overhead, trying to kill me'.¹⁰¹

Orwell recognises that the individual German pilot is simply doing his duty, by 'serving his country, which has the power to absolve him from evil'. This apparent magnanimity on Orwell's part has a rhetorical dimension, for it allows him to make a crucial point:

One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognises the overwhelming strength of patriotism....[A]s a *positive* force there is nothing to set beside it. Christianity and international Socialism are as weak as straw in comparison with it. Hitler and Mussolini rose to power in their own countries very largely because they could grasp this fact and their opponents could not.¹⁰²

The historical and political simplifications in this argument are obvious, but less important than the fact that Orwell accentuates the supposed significance of patriotism the better to argue for his own brand of Socialism.

This opening gambit sets the strategy for 'The Lion and The Unicorn'. Having argued for the centrality of patriotism to an understanding of the world, Orwell will go on in the 'England Your England' section of the essay to focus on what differentiates England from other countries; what makes it a nation worth defending. He casually uses England as a synonym for Britain, arguing that differences between, say, the Scots and the English, 'fade away the moment [they] are confronted by a European'.¹⁰³ He is (perhaps) on firmer ground in considering that the traveller returning to England from Europe recognises that, for all the apparent formlessness, '[t]here is something distinctive in English civilisation'.¹⁰⁴

Orwell starts to tease out some characteristics in the next section of the 'England Your England' segment. Before doing so, he introduces an important idea set out briefly in 'My Country Right or Left': England

has a flavour of its own. Moreover it is continuous, it stretches into the future and into the past, there is something of it that persists, as in a living creature.¹⁰⁵

In the earlier essay, Orwell had argued 'for devotion to something that is changing but is felt to be mystically the same'. In 'My Country Right or Left', this stance was backwards-facing, Orwell hoping that, whatever the changes, 'the England that I was taught to love so long ago . . . is somehow persisting'. By contrast, in 'The Lion and The Unicorn', while the distinctive characteristics of England make it worth fighting for, Orwell argues that the nation must change in order to survive.

The first characteristics Orwell discerns are rather banal: a lack of artistic talent and a love of flowers. Others, however, such as the belief in individual liberty, the lack of power-worship in the working class, and the belief in the rule of law, have more vital aspects. For one thing, they work against the possibility of military dictatorship along totalitarian lines. Accepting that the law is not infallible, Orwell nevertheless argues that 'the totalitarian idea that there is no such thing as law, there is only power, has never taken root'.¹⁰⁶ His justification for this assertion should come as no surprise: 'look about you. Where are the rubber truncheons, where is the castor oil?'.¹⁰⁷

In Section III of the essay, Orwell admits a less engaging characteristic of English society, its class system. Even this, however, is not all-powerful, for, he argues, '[p]atriotism is usually stronger than class hatred'. While clearly an element in middle-class life, Orwell also judges it important to the working class, whose

patriotism is profound, but . . . unconscious. The working man's heart does not leap when he sees a Union Jack . . . but the working class are outstanding in their abhorrence of foreign habits.¹⁰⁸

The argument seems odd next to Orwell's vigorous assertion in 'My Country Right or Left', that 'it is exactly the people whose hearts have never leapt at the sight of a Union Jack who will flinch from revolution when the moment comes'. Since the working class play an integral role in the English revolution Orwell argues for in 'The Lion and The Unicorn',

one can only assume that he had forgotten his earlier contempt for those able to control their hearts in the presence of the national flag.

Section III ends with an analogy of England as a stuffy, Victorian family, one with

rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon . . . in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is still in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts . . . A family with the wrong members in control.¹⁰⁹

The analogy provides Orwell with the licence to tell a few home truths about the more disreputable members of the family. In Section IV, for instance, he notes the general decline of the ruling class, uncles and aunts helpless against the new totalitarian forms of power. In Section VI he targets an unlikely set of twins, the imperialist middle class, and the left-wing intelligentsia. These siblings, 'mentally linked together and interact[ing] upon one another'¹¹⁰, both exhibit signs of enervation: the imperialists, unable to retain power in a disintegrating empire; the intellectuals, reduced to adopting inapplicable European theories and spouting negative critiques. For Orwell, the nation has no need of either.

If these 'relatives' are indicative of outmoded aspects of English life, Orwell also notes a new development, 'the upward and downward extension of the middle class'.¹¹¹ The 'England Your England' segment of the essay ends with Orwell arguing that the past twenty years have witnessed the breakdown of class distinctions between the working-and middle classes in terms of tastes and habits. Furthermore, he predicts that the war will wipe out most of the existing class privileges.¹¹² Yet, Orwell considers, these developments, and the changes consequent upon them, will not adulterate the essential characteristics of English life. The segment ends with the simultaneously rousing and comforting assertion that

England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and into the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same.¹¹³

'Shopkeepers at War', the second part of 'The Lion and The Unicorn', functions as a bridge between the broad social analysis of the first part

of the essay and the call for an English Socialist revolution in the third part. In the 'England Your England' segment, Orwell argues for the unity of England, both socially and over time. In 'Shopkeepers at War', he adopts a more political stance, attempting to show the fatal shortcomings of the country's economic organisation; shortcomings which provide a rationale for Socialism. This analysis allows him, in the final part of the essay, to fuse the coherent patriotism of the English to the necessary Socialist re-organisation, thereby producing an 'English Revolution'.

'Shopkeepers at War' is short, because Orwell has a relatively simple case to put: capitalism has failed; unless England institutes a planned economy along Socialist lines, inevitably it must face defeat at the hands of a planned economy founded on Fascism. The proof of this rather Darwinian analysis can already be seen, Orwell considers, for

[w]hat this war has demonstrated is that private capitalism – that is, an economic system in which land/factories, mines and transport are owned privately and operated solely for profit – *does not work*. It cannot produce the goods.¹¹⁴

The defender of private capitalism might bring forward the United States as evidence to the contrary. Orwell's point, however, is more specific, if less universally valid: Hitler's victories in Europe have 'proved that a planned economy is stronger than a planless one'.¹¹⁵ If this argument is accepted (and in 1941 it had a forceful plausibility) a bleak future lies in prospect for England. Faced with an enemy organised on superior principles, England must either adopt those principles or face conquest. Yet, Orwell judges, in taking the former course, England need not become a replica of Nazi Germany. Firstly, there are Socialist as well as Fascist variants of a planned economy. Secondly, the national characteristics he discerned in the first part of 'The Lion and The Unicorn' argue against the Fascist path being taken.

Not surprisingly, given that 'The Lion and The Unicorn' was written specifically for a general audience, Orwell sets out simple definitions for the Socialist and Fascist varieties of a planned economy. He accepts 'common ownership of the means of production' as a rough starting point for an understanding of Socialism, adding 'approximate equality of income . . . political democracy, and the abolition of all hereditary privileges' to the recipe.¹¹⁶ He describes German Fascism, by contrast, as 'a form of capitalism that borrows from Socialism just such features as will make it efficient for war purposes'.¹¹⁷ Efficiency is a crucial

component, for '[h]owever horrible this system may seem to us, *it works*'.¹¹⁸ In that efficiency lies the key to Fascism's success, and the basis of its threat to an England shackled to private capitalism.

The fundamental difference between the two forms of organisation, Orwell argues, is that while 'Socialism aims, ultimately, at a world-state of free and equal human beings', the motive force behind Fascism is inequality.¹¹⁹ In this fact lies the test of English society. The movement from capitalism to Socialism requires more than a simple technical change; it requires 'equality of sacrifice'. Orwell draws a comparison with the Spanish Civil War, recalling that '[t]he people suffered horribly, but they all suffered alike'.¹²⁰ Such suffering requires a belief in national coherence and a common destiny; in short, it requires patriotism.

For Orwell, the benefits of a Socialist revolution are far-reaching and clear, for 'only by revolution...[can] the native genius of the English people be set free'.¹²¹ He emphasises that such freedom lies within reach, asserting that

England has got to assume its real shape. The England that is only just beneath the surface, in the factories and the newspaper offices, in the aeroplanes and the submarines, has got to take charge of its own destiny.¹²²

It is the call to destiny, encapsulated in the notion of England changing, but staying the same, which invigorates the final part of 'The Lion and The Unicorn', the part entitled 'The English Revolution'.

As the call to factories and offices signals, Orwell envisages a populist revolution, one which spreads beyond rigid class barriers. In 'The English Revolution' segment he compares the need for a genuine mass movement with the sectarianism which hitherto has circumscribed the appeal of Socialism. Instead of intelligent propaganda,

[t]he suffocating stupidity of left-wing propaganda [has] frightened away whole classes of necessary people, factory managers, airmen, naval officers, farmers, white-collar workers, shopkeepers, policemen. All of these people [have] been taught to think of Socialism as something which menaced their livelihood, or as something seditious, alien, 'anti-British', as they would have called it.¹²³

War, however, 'has turned Socialism from a text-book word into a realizable policy'¹²⁴; indeed, Orwell argues, without the transformation

of England into a Socialist state, the war cannot be won. Orwell proposes a loose, six point plan as 'the kind of thing we need'.¹²⁵ Given the tentativeness with which they are proposed, the individual items on the list (including nationalisation, income limitation, and Dominion status for India) are less important than the general aim, which is to turn 'this war into a revolutionary war and England into a Socialist democracy'.¹²⁶ Emphasising the populist tenor of his revolutionary message, Orwell claims to

have deliberately included in it nothing that the simplest person could not understand and see the reason for. In the form in which I have put it, it could have been printed on the front page of the *Daily Mirror*.¹²⁷

A clear, striking (though not unusual) case of Orwell manipulating his argument to suit an expected audience.

'The Lion and the Unicorn' ends with an overt appeal to the patriotism of that audience. Orwell claims that 'patriotism has nothing to do with Conservatism'; that instead 'it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same'.¹²⁸ The latter phrase should seem familiar, for it repeats almost exactly words from 'My Country Right or Left'. Significantly, however, the progress of the war has strengthened Orwell's conviction in the power of patriotism and the need for revolution. 'My Country Right or Left' ends defensively, Orwell merely arguing that no alternative had been found to the building of Socialists on the bones of Blimps. In marked contrast, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' concludes aggressively, Orwell declaring that

[b]y revolution we become more ourselves, not less. There is no question of stopping short, striking a compromise, salvaging 'democracy', standing still. Nothing ever stands still. We must add to our heritage or lose it, we must grow greater or grow less, we must go forward or backward. I believe in England, and I believe that we shall go forward.¹²⁹

A decent number of readers agreed, so that more than 12,000 copies of the essay were published; sizeable in itself, though small by comparison with the hundreds of thousands of *Guilty Men* sold.¹³⁰ The book format had the unusual consequence for one of Orwell's essays, in that it was reviewed at the time of publication. Contemporary critical reception was

mixed, several commentators acknowledging the provocativeness of the argument while disagreeing with the substance.¹³¹ Others were not so positive. Margaret Cole, considering six wartime pamphlets in *The Tribune*, dismisses 'The Lion and the Unicorn' as 'too slight and hasty a sketch to be worth much, and [considers that] it contains some very half-baked remarks'.¹³²

Orwell's old friend Max Plowman did not let fraternal feelings cloud his judgement, writing in *The Adelphi* that 'Orwell's faith is based on a credulity so naive it seems almost cruelty to examine it'.¹³³ Despite his sensitivity, Plowman goes on to inflict some pain, describing the essay sarcastically as 'a gem', an exemplar of the 'ardent superficiality' of contemporary political thinking.¹³⁴ Winifred Horrabin, writing in the radical Left periodical *The Plebs*, admits to finding the essay 'stimulating'. Yet her praise flatters to deceive, for while 'Orwell's chief merit is that he is very challenging....[h]is chief fault is that he over-simplifies'.¹³⁵

Ironically, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' receives its most detailed and perhaps its most perceptive critique in the American periodical, *Partisan Review*.¹³⁶ Written by editor Dwight MacDonald, this appeared a year after the essay's publication in Britain. MacDonald argues that

in its virtues and in its defects, *The Lion and the Unicorn* [sic] is typical of English leftwing political writing. Its approach to politics is impressionistic rather than analytic, literary rather technical, that of the amateur, not the professional.¹³⁷

MacDonald can be forgiven for not knowing that the brief of the Searchlight Books series precluded 'rubber-stamp political jargon', and aimed for 'simple language'. These were seen as virtues rather than vices.

MacDonald specifies two main 'advantages' of the essay's impressionistic approach: the inclusion of cultural observations most analytic theorists would exclude; and a 'human quality [to the writing] . . . you feel it engages him as a moral and cultural whole'.¹³⁸ Interestingly, Marie Hamilton Law had considered these vital to the personal essay. On MacDonald's reading, 'The Lion and the Unicorn' would grace *The Tatler*. Yet he also sees defects, for

if Orwell's scope is broad, it is none too deep; he describes where he should analyse, and poses questions so impressionistically that

his answers get nowhere; he uses terms in a shockingly vague way; he makes sweeping generalisations . . . his innocence of scientific criteria is appalling.¹³⁹

Damning stuff, but the very anti-scientific qualities championed in the essay form by Lukacs and Adorno. For MacDonald, 'The Lion And The Unicorn' rates as an interesting, but failed, treatise; for Adorno, the same features would make it a successful essay.

This begs an important question about the essay form. Can 'The Lion And The Unicorn' escape the requirements of theoretical rigour purely by virtue of the generic fragmentariness of that form? An answer lies in the stated aim of the Searchlight series, 'to criticise and kill what is rotten in Western civilisation and supply constructive ideas for the difficult period ahead'. Ignoring the hyperbole, the series does not promise fully worked-out proposals; it sets out to supply ideas more than supply answers. Winifred Horrabin suggests that this aim might have been achieved, for her criticism does not stop her from noting that 'The Lion and The Unicorn' 'calls for another book in reply'.¹⁴⁰ In this regard, Orwell has utilised the conventions of the essay to good effect.

'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?'

Another of Orwell's essays did generate a reply. 'Our Opportunity' had appeared in the *Left News* in January 1941. In April, the periodical printed a letter by a reader, Douglas Ede, who posed several questions stimulated by the essay and by other *Left News* articles.¹⁴¹ Ede queried Orwell's conception of 'Socialist Democracy', and asked to be told more about 'this new [Socialist] Utopia' he saw the periodical as a whole advocating. Where 'Our Opportunity' ended with two questions, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' begins with two, which Orwell had extracted from Ede's letter:

- (i) Is there any reason to think that socialism will be genuinely preferable to capitalist Democracy?
- (ii) Can Democracy, as we know it, survive into a collectivist age, or is it simply a reflection of *laissez faire* capitalism?¹⁴²

Orwell's short answer to the first question might be 'not necessarily', while to the second it might be 'quite possibly'. The equivocations are

important, for in 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' Orwell warns that there is no simple answer to the question posed in the essay's title. This position does not rule out predictions; instead, Orwell considers that the future must be fought for, not simply waited for.

Early in 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' Orwell examines the 'all-important doctrine of "historic necessity"'. He notes that Socialists do not claim that a

collectivist economy will make human life happier, easier, or even freer *immediately*. On the contrary, the transition may make life unbearable for a long period, perhaps for hundreds of years. There is a certain goal that we have got to reach – cannot help reaching ultimately – and the way to it may lead through some dreadful places.¹⁴³

The bleak picture conjured up seems hardly likely to rally the troops, yet the prospect of hardship is tempered by the belief in inevitable development towards an alluring goal. As with other predictions by Orwell, the timescale for these developments remains elastic, though no less depressing for that.

For all its supposed importance, the idea of 'historic necessity' is only loosely worked out in this argument. The assertion of a 'goal that we have to reach – cannot help reach ultimately' verges on the self-contradictory. Is the 'necessity' linked to the desire to reach the (unspecified) goal, or linked to the fact that ultimately, the goal will be reached in any case? The possibility of ideological travels through 'dreadful places' on the road to this goal also suggests that the end might justify the means. Yet Orwell does nothing to clarify these problems by next conjuring up the Utopian image of 'pure communism' set out at the head of this chapter: equality; the end of oppression; the triumph of love and curiosity over greed and fear. He argues that such a society 'is our destiny, and there is no escaping it; but *how* we reach it, and *how soon*, depends on ourselves'.¹⁴⁴

In this formulation of 'historic necessity', human action is integral. This runs somewhat at odds with the notion of an inescapable 'destiny'. Orwell then complicates the argument further by introducing yet another form of 'historic necessity'. He contends that Socialism, defined as

central ownership of the means of production, plus political

democracy – is the necessary next step towards communism, just as capitalism was the necessary next step after feudalism.¹⁴⁵

This conflates two senses of 'necessary': necessary as the pre-requisite for something else, and necessary as something inevitable. The second definition is the easier to argue for, given that, in hindsight, capitalism can seem the inevitable successor to feudalism. The future, however, remains contingent. Despite this contingency, Orwell argues that Socialism will inevitably supersede capitalism, suggesting that '[t]he forces making for centralised control and planned production are overwhelming. This is the way the world is going'.¹⁴⁶ Such certainty invites the counter-argument that historic necessity negates the need to struggle for Socialism. This complacency ingores Orwell's evidence for the triumph of centralised control – Nazi Germany. For Orwell, Germany operates as the state in which control and planning are most advanced and most effective; hence, the potential for its victory over Britain, a nation still functioning under the outmoded system of capitalism.

Orwell boldly designates Nazism a 'kind of socialism, though of a non-democratic kind'.¹⁴⁷ Given his definition of Socialism as centralised ownership of the means of production, plus democracy, a non-democratic variant is, of course, plausible. This inherently hostile variant also sweeps away complacency, demanding counter-action from British Socialism. Centralised planning may be inevitable, but how it is applied in individual states is contestable. Orwell makes this point explicitly, judging that 'the transition to a centralised economy must happen, is happening everywhere . . . [though] it is safe to assume that it will take different forms in different countries'.¹⁴⁸

Ironically, Orwell's belief in the inevitability of Socialism's triumph over capitalism comes from the successes of Nazi Germany. In allowing for national differences, however, he tempers the gloomy future offered by historical necessity, predicting that certain features of capitalist democracy (hatred of civil violence, freedom of speech) will outlive its inevitable demise. More forcefully, he prophesies:

When our revolution is accomplished our social and economic structure will be totally different, but we shall retain many of the habits and thoughts of behaviour that we learned in an earlier age. Nations do not easily wipe out their past.¹⁴⁹

There is more than a hint of nostalgia in this, and the argument echoes the idea in 'My Country Right or Left' of nations changing while staying the same. Orwell is not recklessly sanguine about the future, however; historic necessity may lead to the triumph of German 'Socialism' as easily as the British variety. Indeed, he considers that unless British capitalism is overthrown from within, Nazism is the more likely outcome.

What distinguishes 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' from both 'My Country Right or Left' and 'Our Opportunity' is the downplaying of patriotism as the central motivating force. Not that patriotism is dismissed entirely, for Orwell states that '[n]o revolution in England has a chance of success unless it takes account of England's past'.¹⁵⁰ Even so, taking account of the past hardly approximates building Socialism on the bones of a Blimp, as Orwell had suggested in 'My Country Right or Left'. Nor does 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' easily accommodate the argument that 'a revolutionary has to be a patriot, and a patriot has to be a revolutionary', an argument which provides the thematic core of 'Our Opportunity'. Orwell's approach is less hortatory in 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?'

One reason for the relatively muted tone is Douglas Ede's letter, which prompted Orwell's essay in reply. Ede suggests to the editor of the *Left News* that

the evils of capitalistic Democracy we already know, and even *Left News's* able articles on communism and totalitarianism, are fairly common knowledge. But the new Utopia you advocate, tell us more of that.¹⁵¹

Ede's comments can be read either as unwittingly naive or (more likely) as knowingly facetious. He appears flippant in his acceptance of the evils of capitalism, communism and totalitarianism. 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' is Orwell's antidote to that flippancy; he injects a dose of harsh realism into his conception of the actual possibility of Socialism.

The overt patriotism of the earlier essays ironically registers the perilous position of Britain in late 1940. By the spring of 1941, however, Orwell's war diary records his recognition that, while the immediate threat of invasion had passed, '[t]he feeling of helplessness is growing in everyone . . . The worst is that the crisis now coming is a crisis of hunger, which the English people have no real experience of'.¹⁵² The immediate future looked set to be one of slow, grinding struggle. The

Utopia Douglas Ede alludes to could not but be an illusory hope in April 1941. 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism' attempts to shatter that illusion, while at the same time providing the struggle for British Socialism with a rationale.

Four months later Orwell wound up the first of his war diaries with the weary comment

There is no victory in sight at present. We are in for a long, dreary exhausting war, with everyone growing poorer all the time. The new phase I foresaw earlier has now started, and the quasi-revolutionary period which began with Dunkirk is finished.¹⁵³

British Socialism had failed to grasp the possibilities Orwell had detected and described in essays such as 'My Country Right or Left', 'Our Opportunity', 'The Lion and The Unicorn' and 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?' Other possibilities would eventually present themselves, and Orwell's view of the prospects for a Socialist revolution in Britain would ebb and flow throughout the war. Nevertheless, the end of 1941 marks a significant if sombre moment in the continuing development of his ideas on Socialism.

Notes

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- 3 George Orwell, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', *Left News* (April 1941), 1682-5 (p. 1682).
- 4 Orwell, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', p. 1684.
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- 6 Orwell, 'Will Freedom Die With Capitalism?', p. 1683.
- 7 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 171.
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- 12 See *CEJL I*, p. 15 (footnote).
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- 14 Orwell, 'The Spike', p. 24. *CEJL I*, p. 36.
- 15 Orwell, 'The Spike', p. 25. *CEJL I*, p. 37.
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- 25 Jameson, 'Documents', p. 11.
- 26 Jameson, 'Documents', p. 15.
- 27 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 214.
- 28 George Orwell, letter to Cyril Connolly, 8 June 1937. *CEJL I*, 268–9 (p. 269).
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- 30 William B. Angier, 'Why I Joined the I.L.P. By a London Tram Conductor', *New Leader*, 25 May 1934, p. 3.
- 31 Fenner Brockway, 'Your Place is in the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 25 February 1938, p. 3.
- 32 Selected 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' testaments in *New Leader*: 'N.S.', 6 June 1938, p. 3; Rudolph Messel, 17 June 1938, p. 5.; George Orwell, 24 June 1938, p. 4; five individuals, 8 July 1938, p. 5.
- 33 George Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 24 June 1938, p. 4. *CEJL I*, 336–8, (p. 337).
- 34 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 35 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 36 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 37 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 38 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
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- 42 Orwell, letter to Read, January 1939, p. 378.
- 43 George Orwell, letter to Herbert Read, 5 March 1939. *CEJL I*, 385–7 (p. 386).
- 44 Orwell, letter to Read, March 1939, p. 387.
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- 46 Orwell, letter to Herbert Read, March 1939, pp. 385–6.
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- 49 Orwell, 'Democracy in the British Army', p. 237. *CEJL I*, p. 403.
- 50 Orwell, 'Democracy in the British Army', p. 237. *CEJL I*, p. 403–4.
- 51 Orwell, 'Democracy in the British Army', p. 237. *CEJL I*, p. 403.
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- 54 Orwell, 'Democracy in the British Army', p. 238. *CEJL I*, p. 405.
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- 59 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 199.
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Taking Sides: Literature versus Politics

If one faces facts one must admit that nearly everything describable as Socialist literature is dull, tasteless or bad.

George Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, 1937.¹

On the whole the literary history of the thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics. For any writer who accepts or partially accepts the discipline of a political party is sooner or later faced with the alternative: toe the line, or shut up.

George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', 1940.²

The question that is important for us is: can literature survive in . . . [a totalitarian] environment? I think that one must answer shortly that it cannot. If totalitarianism becomes world-wide and permanent, what we have known as literature must come to an end.

George Orwell, 'Literature and Totalitarianism', *The Listener*, 1941.³

As has already been argued, placing the essay 'Why I Write' at the beginning of *CEJL* distorts an understanding of Orwell's writing career. In 1946, when 'Why I Write' was published, Orwell designates political purpose as a motive force in his work. Yet the admission in that same essay, that he had written lifeless books and humbug, indicate that other forces had prevailed on occasions. The three quotations at the head of this chapter suggest that, whatever Orwell argued in 1946, his views on the relationship between literature and politics had gone through several incarnations in the thirties and early forties.

In 1936, as the first quotation shows, Orwell's disdain for – and despair at – Socialist literature could not be plainer. Though he claims that Socialist writers (he names 'Shaw, Barbusse, Upton Sinclair, William Morris, Waldo Frank, etc.,etc.') 'have always been dull, empty windbags', he adds that talented writers had eschewed Socialism.⁴ While

still pessimistic, this view does at least argue that talented writers should adopt politically radical stances. Yet the second quotation, from an essay written three years later, warns writers away from political parties. More sweepingly, Orwell seems to decry the involvement of writers in politics of any kind during the thirties. These judgements come with the weight of personal experience, Orwell having only recently withdrawn from the I.L.P.

By 1941, however, when the essay from which the third quotation comes is published, Orwell gloomily prophesies the death of literature at the hand of totalitarian forces. The projection of immediate concerns onto an even bleaker future is a tactic Orwell has used in other essays, and should be taken with a pinch of scepticism. Nevertheless, the general tenor of the argument runs that, rather than writers having to disengage from politics, political ideology threatens to annihilate writing itself.

The vigour with which Orwell couches each of these arguments conceals the fact that his pronouncements on the interaction of literature and politics during much of the thirties were spasmodic. This places him at odds with many other young Left-leaning writers of the period. Writers such as Stephen Spender and C.Day-Lewis made something of a habit of stating and re-stating their respective positions. No doubt a partial explanation for Orwell's reticence lies in his relative obscurity; his opinions were not considered important enough to seek out. More crucially, however, Orwell did not belong to the cliques of writers more than ready to advertise their radical credentials. He did not, for example, write for such literary periodicals as *Left Review*, in which the publication of political commitment was accepted as one of the duties writers had to perform.

Admittedly, the periodicals for which Orwell did review and write in the early thirties did mix literature and politics: *The New English Weekly* styled itself 'A Review of Public Affairs, Literature and the Arts', and published short stories, and poetry by such luminaries as Ezra Pound, e.e.cummings and Dylan Thomas. The periodical was less inclined to publish literary analysis, however: public affairs were its emphasis. *The Adelphi*, Orwell's main periodical outlet at the time, was politicised by Middleton Murry's temporary advocacy of Communism. In essays such as 'Communism and Art: or Bolshevism and Ballyhoo', Murry tackles the question of the relationship between politics and aesthetics.⁵ Orwell's contributions to *The Adelphi*, however, were limited to reviews and the occasional essay; neither 'The Spike' nor 'A Hanging' took on literary questions.

When Orwell did consider literature publicly in the thirties, it was often by a circuitous route: the review of the work of other authors, such as Henry Miller; argument on the rendering of the Spanish Civil War; or analysis of fashions in literary criticism, as in his review of Philip Henderson's Marxist work, *The Novel Today*. 'In Defence of The Novel', which appeared in the *New English Weekly* in November 1936, was more an attack on the hypocrisy of reviewing than a serious analysis of the novel itself. And, as the title suggests, 'Bookshop Memories' casts a wry, if nostalgic eye at the monotony of work in a bookshop. Only in the autobiographical section of *The Road To Wigan Pier*, or in the declarative essay 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', does Orwell designate himself explicitly as a writer.⁶ In neither of these pieces does he exhibit great optimism, either about the quality of Socialist writing, or the future for writers themselves. Indeed, in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' he comments grimly that 'at a moment like the present writing books is not enough'.⁷

Orwell's chief concern in terms of literature in the latter part of the decade and into the early 1940s was the prospect that the freedom of writers to write as they wished might disappear. Some of the arguments in this debate have been examined in Chapter Four, which considered Orwell's assessment of totalitarianism. The distortion of Spanish Civil War coverage also plays a part, Orwell seeing veracity as a quality for which the writer should strive. While this chapter integrates those concerns, the focus on literature allows an examination of Orwell's attitude to his own craft, to the arguments and writings of his contemporaries, and to the future of literature as a whole.

Orwell's most extended treatment of literature comes in the three essays which make up the collection *Inside The Whale*, written in 1939, and published in 1940. In the title essay, Orwell exposes the shortcomings of the young British writers of the thirties, especially the uncritical adherence of many to Communism. His detection of a slavish devotion to ideology triggers the conclusion which provides the second quotation at the head of the chapter: that in the thirties a writer did well to keep out of politics. These are strange sentiments for a writer who waded knee-deep into political argument and action as determinedly as did Orwell.

The two other essays from *Inside the Whale* present different analyses of the interaction between literature and politics, though there are points of similarity with 'Inside the Whale'. 'Boys' Weeklies' takes up the argument first sketched in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and reiterated in 'Inside the Whale', that Socialist writers do not provide readable

work which displays the Socialist perspective to advantage. In 'Charles Dickens', by contrast, he considers Dickens in terms of his moral vigour, and social conscience. Dickens provides Orwell with a critical yardstick by which to measure, and with which to beat, the politically committed writers of the thirties.

Inside the Whale marks the first time in which Orwell's essays appear in anything other than the periodical medium, though two of the three essays were in fact also published in periodicals: 'Inside the Whale' appeared in the American annual, *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, while 'Boys' Weeklies' was published in *Horizon*. Interestingly, more readers would have read 'Boys' Weeklies' in *Horizon* than in the complete book. Only 1,000 copies of *Inside the Whale* were printed before the type was distributed, while *Horizon*, even in its infancy, boasted a circulation of 8,000.⁸ The periodical medium not only provided an alternative audience for *Inside the Whale*; in the case of 'Boys' Weeklies', it also provided one which was larger. Even in the case of *New Directions*, the links with British periodicals were not severed entirely: the annual considered itself the trans-Atlantic equivalent of John Lehmann's periodical, *New Writing*.⁹

During the war, Orwell found a new outlet for his views on literature, and via a new medium – radio. In December 1940 the B.B.C. broadcast an interview between Orwell and the writer and broadcaster Desmond Hawkins on the topic of 'The Proletarian Writer'. The interview was later published in the B.B.C. periodical *The Listener*.¹⁰ Orwell was to present four programmes for the B.B.C. in the following year, all concerned with questions of literature, and all published in *The Listener*. Admittedly, the programmes themselves, broadcast on the Indian Service, probably reached a small audience, relative to India's massive population. Whatever that audience, however, *The Listener* itself commanded a circulation of over 60,000, nearly double that of *The New Statesman and Nation*.¹¹ Orwell's views might not have been heard in India, but they were read in Britain.

One of the 1941 *Listener* essays gloomily considers the opposition of 'Literature and Totalitarianism', and throughout 1941 the threat of a Fascist victory informed Orwell's perception of literature's future. Pessimism does not equal defeatism, however, and Orwell lent his support to the manifesto, 'Why Not War Writers?', prepared by young writers and published in *Horizon* in October 1941.¹² The manifesto called for the formation of an official war writers group, and increased Government recognition and assistance for writers. Though nothing

came of this effort, it still registers Orwell's desire to safeguard writing against what he perceived as the mortal threat of totalitarianism. For Orwell, that threat would remain long after 1941.

Literature, Politics and Periodicals in the Early Thirties

Orwell entered the debate on the role of the writer and the purpose of literature relatively late, and many of the argumentative battles he engaged in had begun in the early thirties. Periodicals provided an essential vehicle for these debates; many were purpose-built for the task of publicising radical literary lines. In other periodicals, political activism struck only a momentary spark. A further group consciously distanced itself from political questions, as much as it was possible in a decade so entangled in struggle.

Exemplary of the group of momentarily activated periodicals was the *The Adelphi*, which announced its affiliation with the I.L.P in October 1932. Several essays carried ruminations on the impact of politics on literature and art – and vice versa. In September 1932, *The Adelphi* published 'The Poet And Revolution' by C.Day Lewis, in which Day Lewis spiritedly calls for writers to involve themselves directly in the struggle for Communism.¹³ A more representative essay, however, was Middleton Murry's 'Communism and Art: or Bolshevism and Ballyhoo'. The title gives away something of the essay's argument: Murry argues for 'creative', 'imaginative' Communism, and against the 'negative and reductive' (read materialist) Communism of the Bolsheviks.¹⁴ Murry wraps his preferred type of Communism in quasi-mystical jargon, writing that in 'the formation of the revolutionary [Communist] nucleus, the dynamic relation between man and man, and man and the living universe, feels towards its own recreation'.¹⁵ This hardly seems likely to foment mass rebellion.

Other writers in other periodicals preached more orthodox forms of Marxism. Amongst these was the young radical John Cornford, whose provocative essay 'Left?' appeared in the radical, but short-lived periodical, *Cambridge Left* in 1933. Begun in the summer of 1933, *Cambridge Left* lasted only five seasons (and five numbers), but in that time managed to include the work of J.D.Bernal, Naomi Mitchison, W.H.Auden, and even a review from someone whose fame would eventually rival all three – the apprentice spook, Donald Maclean. In 'Left?', Cornford thinks it imperative that the writer

must actively participate in the revolutionary struggles of society if he is not going to collapse into the super-subjectivity of the older writers [Joyce, Eliot, Pound]. He must emphatically deny the contradiction between art and life.¹⁶

Despite the 'bankruptcy of the older writers', Cornford claims to detect in the work of younger writers 'the beginnings of a politically-conscious revolutionary literature for the first time in the history of English culture'.¹⁷

Cornford was not alone amongst contributors to *Cambridge Left* in acknowledging the impact of politics upon the ideas and self-image of writers. In 'A Note on Poetry and Politics' which graced the first issue of the periodical, it is argued that

[t]he motives for writing, and of those who are writing for this paper, have changed, along with their motives for doing anything. It is not so much an intellectual choice, as the forcible intrusion of social issues.¹⁸

Not all the contributors of *Cambridge Left*, however, were willing to dispense with intellectual choice. A review by Donald Maclean of R.D.Charque's *Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution*, praises Charques' Marxist approach to literature as that 'which led to the creation of CAMBRIDGE LEFT'.¹⁹ In the Spring and Summer issues of 1934, Helen Davis and H.V.Kemp analysed 'The Rise and Fall of Bourgeois Poetry' along Marxist lines, stirringly claiming that '[a] rising class smashes the worn-out property relations; a new culture is developed on the basis of the new relations – this is the law of history'.²⁰ Unfortunately, Kemp and Davis were not able to function in that new culture, at least through the pages of *Cambridge Left*; the Autumn 1934 issue of the periodical was to be its last.

The final issue of *Cambridge Left* carried an analysis of the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, signalling the high regard with which the status of Soviet writers and writing was held by certain of their British counterparts. J.P.Tuck's 'English Criticism and the Soviet Writers' Congress' praises the Congress of Soviet Writers as a

serious collective attempt . . . to use literature as a means for the creation of a conscious, free, educated, cultured, classless

society Such aims are the reverse of those of the middle-class critics of England and America, who seek a purely personal art and a purely personal truth.²¹

Perhaps unbeknownst to Tuck, many writers in the Soviet Union were finding the truth all too personal.

Cambridge Left fell in the autumn of 1934, but the torch of radical literary endeavour did not lie upon the ground for long. The first number of the *Left Review*, the vehicle for much left-leaning literary activity in the thirties, appeared in October 1934. The first issue stresses (erroneously) that 'a second world war [is] oppressively near'. If the portentousness of the times was misread, there still existed the expectation that writers would take up a political position. The first *Left Review* carries a statement of aim of the Writer's International (British Section) which describes 'a crisis of ideas in the capitalist world to-day [sic] not less considerable than the crisis in economics'. Elaborating on this general point, the statement continues that

[t]he decadence of the past twenty years of English literature and the theatre cannot be understood apart from all that separates 1913 and 1934. It is the collapse of a culture.²²

Against this bleak (or, for some, promising) prospect, the group declares the need 'to organize an association of revolutionary writers . . . [which should] apply for affiliation to the International of Revolutionary Writers'. Writers should be accepted

- (a) who see in the development of Fascism the terrorist dictatorship of dying capitalism . . . and consider that the best in civilization of the past can only be preserved and further developed by joining in the struggle of the working class for a new socialist society . . .
- (b) who, if members of the working class, desire to express in their work, more effectively than in the past, the struggle of their class.
- (c) who will use their pens and their influence against imperialist war and in defence of the Soviet Union, the State where the foundations of Socialism have already been laid.²³

For the most part the concerns expressed here can be categorised into the positive and the negative: anti-capitalist, anti-Fascist,

anti-imperialist; pro-socialist, pro-working class, pro-Soviet. Such polarisation tended towards a mentality which assumed that those not for such ideals were against them. There also existed the danger that rigid orthodoxy might be confused with ideological solidarity.

An ambiguity lies in the term 'civilization' which illuminates a significant (if somewhat unrecognised dilemma) for members of the Writers' International. If, as they argue, the decadence of the past twenty years of English literature has signalled the collapse of a culture, what is the 'civilisation' the group is defending against Fascism? The answer seems to be 'the best in civilisation of the past', and (except for the twenty preceding years of decadence) its modern developments. Matthew Arnold might well approve of this defence, as no doubt would more overtly conservative groups.

The question of what Left writers of all persuasions were defending would increasingly become important as the high hopes for the transformation of Britain in the early thirties were popped by the pins of political reality. This failure of art and Left politics to convert Britain to Socialism was only exacerbated by the growing threat of Fascist conquest as the decade wore on. As the efforts to bring about internal political change failed, writers more and more abandoned revolutionary manifestoes, fearing the menace to their remaining independence from the external danger of Fascism.

It would be wrong to conclude from the Writers' International statement of aim that either the *Left Review* itself or its contributors slavishly followed the proposals contained within the statement. For, while the statement appears to set out a firm position, the response of authors to it reveal considerably less than unanimity. A prickly debate arose in the pages of the *Left Review*, so that for several issues a separate section was put aside under the title 'Controversy', to deal with the often impassioned reactions. A catalyst for debate was a contribution from the writer and critic Alec Brown. Brown suggests that 'during the initial of our magazine [it is] most important to carry on rigorous criticism of all highbrowism, intellectualism, abstract rationalism, and similar dilettantism'.²⁴

This diktat triggered a furious attack from Stephen Spender. In an essay entitled, 'Writers and Manifestoes', Spender argues that

there is a great difference between even the most stupefying and severe censorship and the attempt to regard art as a mere instrument in the hands of a party. The difference is that censorship cuts

or bans books that have already been written: but the principles laid down in [Alec Brown's] manifesto order the manner in which they should be writtenNo censorship has ever gone this far.²⁵

Granted the dubiousness of the final claim, Spender's denunciation of Brown testifies to the diversity of opinion within *Left Review*. Admittedly, Spender's definition of censorship does not coincide precisely with Brown's call for 'rigorous criticism', but this does not invalidate Spender's general fear, that such criticism might lead to rigorous self-censorship.

Spender was certainly not alone in arguing against the dominant positions set out in *Left Review*: Lewis Grassie Gibbon provides a more general critique, describing the claim that capitalist literature had entered a decadent phase as 'bolshevik blah . . . inspired by (a) misapprehension; (b) ignorance; or (c) spite'.²⁶ While keen to establish his own radical credentials, Grassie Gibbon prefers not to sully them by association: 'Not all revolutionary writers (I am a revolutionary writer) are cretins. But the influence of such delayed adolescents, still in the thrall of wishfulfilment [sic] dreams, seems to have predominated in the drawing up of this resolution'.²⁷ Whatever their political differences, the contributors to *Left Review* cannot be criticised for a lack of rhetorical vigour.

Though not as theoretically homogeneous as *Cambridge Left*, *Left Review* did champion things Soviet. Chapter Four documented certain flights of pro-Soviet fancy: Louis Aragon's panegyric to a tractor factory; the breathlessly enthusiastic reporting of Soviet writers' conferences; Georg Dimitrov's speech to the Soviet Writers' Association. The last of these deserves a short reprise, for not only does Dimitrov declare that 'the atmosphere of the Soviet Union, the very air we breathe, is that of creation'; he rubs (Siberian?) salt in the wounds by announcing the grim news that '[a]broad revolutionary writers are at grips with exceptional difficulties. They suffer poverty, they are thrown into prison or into concentration camps'.²⁸ Whether the *Left Review* writers not languishing in prison or in concentration camps questioned their own revolutionary credentials cannot be known. Even so, many those who wished to be – or portrayed themselves as – revolutionary writers in Britain, looked longingly to the Soviet Union as a model for their own efforts.

The wide variety of periodicals begun in the thirties, coupled with the great number already established at the beginning of the decade, allowed

for a great many individual positions on the interaction of politics and literature. This was sometimes imposed by format or frequency of publication. A weekly such as *Time and Tide*, for example, while it contained a regular book section, 'Men and Books' – surely an odd name for what had begun as a feminist periodical – directed its attention more towards weekly political events. Something of the same can be said of *The New Statesman and Nation*, the most prominent of the left-wing weeklies. Despite the fact that its literature section was an important part of the whole, the placement of the section at the rear of the paper signalled that weekly political developments took precedence.

Other periodicals integrated literature and politics for different reasons. *The Modern Scot* was highly politicised, but though contributors such as Naomi Mitchison, Edwin Muir and Hugh MacDiarmid had Left credentials (of varying shades) the focus of this periodical was the revival of Scottish nationalism. The editorial to the original number, published in Spring 1930, for example, propounds the

firm conviction that whatever lasting benefits Scotland may receive will come through the re-establishment of an individual Scottish culture

It will be the purpose of 'The Modern Scot' to provide an organ for those artists and writers whose experiments are most valuable to Scotland to-day and through whom our new culture may come into being.²⁹

Other periodicals tilted the balance in favour of literature over politics. This is hardly surprising in the case of *Scrutiny*. Even so, politics could not be dismissed entirely from its essentially academic literary concerns. The initial number of the periodical, published in 1932, proclaims that

Scrutiny is not to be a purely literary review. But what is meant by that hint of a generous interest in 'modern affairs' at large Well, the devotion to [politics] at the party level, is, no doubt, somewhat necessary. But something else is necessary – and prior: a play of the free intelligence upon the underlying issues³⁰

Politics is flirted with, coyly, but the admission of something both necessary and prior builds in a clear escape clause. Politics did not play a major part in the criticism produced.

New Verse confidently advertised its independence from politics. Established in January 1933 by Geoffrey Grigson, *New Verse* claimed its mandate simply to be the communication of poems. In its opening number Grigson declares *New Verse* to be aligned 'to no literary or politico-literary cabal'.³¹ The second number reiterates this point: 'Every poet is asked to send in his work; and is warned again that NEW VERSE has no politics'.³² Yet, if *New Verse* pushed no political barrow, it was not entirely uninterested in the political leanings of poets. The desire to know the mind of the writer reached something of a high point (though perhaps it was not very high) in October 1934, when *New Verse* published the first batch of replies to 'An Enquiry' of poets.

The August number of *New Verse* set out the rationale for the enquiry, arguing that in discussions over the role of the poet 'the arguers are usually critics, journalists and those tied up in a disappearing present'.³³ To counterbalance the bias, *New Verse* questioned the poets themselves, making it clear that 'poets of all parties or no parties and of every age' had been asked. The results, it was argued, would 'have exceptional value . . . as a "document" of practice'.³⁴ The pseudo-scientific language was continued in the form of the rather po-faced questions the poets were asked. These included such searching probes as: 'Do you intend your poetry to be useful to yourself or others?'; 'Do you wait for a spontaneous impulse before writing a poem; if so, is this impulse verbal or visual?'; 'As a poet what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?'.³⁵ Laura Riding swiftly put the bias of the last question to the sword, noting that, '[a]s a poet, I am distinguished from ordinary men, first, in that I am a woman'.³⁶ More pertinent to the concerns of this chapter was the question: 'Do you take your stand with any political or politico-economic party or creed?'.³⁷

Of the forty poets sent these questions, twenty-two replied. Apart from Riding, these included writers from across the political spectrum: Hugh MacDiarmid, Wyndham Lewis, Roy Campbell and Dylan Thomas amongst others.³⁷ Grigson remarks that 'in general those poets who have passed their working lives walking backwards down an ascending escalator . . . appear to have thought the enquiry DANGEROUS [sic], a Bolshevik trap'.³⁸ Yet he is forced to concede that though such conservatives as T.S. Eliot had not replied, neither had Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis and others more sympathetic to Bolshevism, traps or otherwise.

On the allegiance of individual writers to a party or creed, the replies,

understandably, were varied. If nothing else, this variety upsets the naive myth of the common political commitment writers at the time; or, at least, of writers answering questions posed by *New Verse*. Almost half of those who replied either rejected the question, or answered that they did not advocate a political creed or party. Louis MacNeice, for example, rather feebly (or sarcastically) whines, '[i]n weaker moments I wish I could [stand by a creed]'.³⁹ Wyndham Lewis, by contrast, claims to 'stand exactly midway between the Bolshevik and the Fascist', while Robert Graves declares that 'everyone should fight his own battles and no one else's'.⁴⁰

Of those who did admit to a creed or party, only two were willing to specify; both, for some reason, were Scots. Hugh MacDiarmid names a party (the Communist Party), while Edwin Muir names a political-economic creed (the 'ideas of Social Credit').⁴¹ The rest, though they express support for Left ideas, do so either with such timidity or with such bombast that their political resolve remains highly suspect. Exemplary of the first type is Norman Cameron's comment that: 'I believe that Communism is necessary and good, but I'm not eager for it. To act, from a feeling of moral compulsion, as if I were eager for it would be hysterical'.⁴² Dylan Thomas beautifully characterises (and unwittingly caricatures) the second type, all sound and fury:

I take my stand with any revolutionary body that asserts it to be the right of all men [sic] to share, equally and impartially, every production of man from man and from the sources of production at man's disposal, for only through such an essentially revolutionary body can there be the possibility of a communal art.⁴³

While this answer advocates noble principles, it hardly suggests Thomas's willingness to engage in practical political activity. Indeed, though this kind of statement might be acceptable in the company of other writers, it would be unlikely to draw much sympathy from those actively involved in politics.

Enter Orwell [belatedly]

Compared to the hyperbole of Thomas, Orwell's first appearance on an increasingly crowded stage barely constitutes a speaking part, and in itself provides only an oblique view of Orwell's attitude to the role of the writer. In November 1935 he reviewed Henry Miller's controversial

first novel *Tropic of Cancer*, for the *New English Weekly*. At the time, and for many years after, the book was banned in Britain, but Orwell strongly advises readers to obtain a copy, defending it as 'a remarkable book'.⁴⁴ He praises Miller for the quality of his prose, for 'passages of rather Whitmanesque enthusiasm' and for the attempt to 'get at real facts'.⁴⁵

His views both on Miller and on *Tropic of Cancer* are developed slightly in a later review of that author's second novel, *Black Spring*. In judging the later novel as less successful than *Tropic of Cancer*, Orwell reiterates his praise of the earlier book, adding that it 'cast a kind of bridge across the frightful gulf that exists, in fiction, between the intellectual and the man-in-the-street [sic]'.⁴⁶ The reviews themselves are relatively unimportant, except in foreshadowing themes which are developed at greater length, and to greater purpose four years later in Orwell's polemical essay 'Inside The Whale'. A key element that Orwell detects and praises in Miller's work, is that writer's attempt to convey reality, no matter how unappealing.

'Bookshop Memories'

A rather more mundane reality forms the basis of 'Bookshop Memories', published in *Fortnightly* in November 1936.⁴⁷ Confusingly, *Fortnightly*, established in 1865, had been published monthly for all but its first year. Anthony Trollope had helped in the setting up of the periodical, which had once boasted Frank Harris as its editor, but in 1936 it concentrated on centre-left politics and the more genteel side of literature.⁴⁸ 'Bookshop Memories' falls into the second category, being a memoir of time spent working in a second hand bookshop.

Even in this docile environment, Orwell cannot pass up the opportunity of puncturing preconceptions, beginning the essay with the comment that

[w]hen I worked in a second-hand bookshop – so easily pictured, if you don't work in one, as a kind of paradise where charming old gentlemen browse eternally among calf-bound volumes – the chief thing that struck me was the rarity of really bookish people.⁴⁹

In the essay, Orwell portrays a dulled world in which customers do not know good books from bad, in which they themselves are somehow

'moth-eaten and aimless'. He grabs the opportunity to satirize the stamp collectors who frequent the shop, and point out the tackiness of the Christmas card business, remembering an invoice which read '2 doz. Infant Jesus with rabbits'.⁵⁰

On literature itself, Orwell comments that the bookshop's lending library allowed you to

see people's real tastes, not their pretended ones, and the one thing that strikes you is how completely the 'classical' English novelists have dropped out of favour. It is simply useless to put Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Trollope, etc. into the ordinary lending library; nobody takes them out.⁵¹

The distance between the concerns expressed here and those commanding the pages of the likes of the *Left Review* is palpable. Yet Orwell, in focussing on such mundane territory, is approximating Henry Miller's attempt to get at 'real facts'. In doing so, Orwell also reinforces the sheer size of the gulf between the intellectual *Left Review* reader, and the second-hand book lover, the literary equivalent of the man-in-the-street.

'In Defence of the Novel'

Questions of how literature functions in the world also inform 'In Defence of the Novel', published in the *New English Weekly* in the same month as 'Bookshop Memories'.⁵² The title is a little deceptive, for the essay could as legitimately be called 'An Attack on Reviews'. The two are linked, however, for Orwell blames what he perceives as the low prestige of the novel on the abysmal standards of reviewing. The failure of reviewers to differentiate properly between good and bad writing, so that 'all novels are thrust upon you as works of genius', has led a sceptical public to suspect that all novels must be mediocre.⁵³

Orwell partly excuses reviewers, recognising (perhaps as a reviewer himself) that to write frankly about all books received would be financial suicide; bills have to be paid, after all. In addition, the reviewer, possibly an admirer of highbrow novels and novelists, must of necessity assess works which fall criminally short of the ideal. Inevitably, hyperbole must

be employed to fill the abyss between the artist and the artisan. As Orwell puts it:

to apply a decent standard to the ordinary run of novels is like weighing a flea on a spring-balance intended for elephants. On such a balance as that a flea would simply fail to register; you have to start by constructing another balance which revealed the fact that there are big fleas and little fleas. And this approximately is what [the reviewer] does.⁵⁴

When such standards apply, intelligent readers dismiss the review.

More seriously, however, those same readers might dismiss what is under review, so that 'it is possible for a novel of real merit to escape notice, merely because it has been praised in the same terms as tripe'.⁵⁵ Given the concerns of this thesis, Orwell's proposes an apt solution to the dilemma:

just *one* periodical (one would be enough for a start) which makes a speciality of novel reviewing but refuses to take any notice of tripe, and in which the reviewers *are* reviewers and not ventriloquists' dummies clapping their jaws when the publisher pulls the string.⁵⁶

Considering that Orwell himself was reviewing for the *New English Weekly* at the time, he seems to be, if not biting, then at least nipping at the hand that feeds him.

Orwell acknowledges that certain periodicals do review novels with a certain degree of critical detachment, but he charges that these

belong to the highbrow world, a world in which it is already assumed that novels, as such, are despicable. But the novel is a popular form of art, and it is no use to approach it with the *Criterion-Scrutiny* assumption that literature is a game of back-scratching (claws in or out according to circumstances) between tiny cliques of highbrows.⁵⁷

Orwell's targets here (hack reviewers, highbrow magazines) are rather puny, but the argument put forward in 'In Defence of the Novel' approximates that used against a ~~more~~ powerful foe: the need for vigorous, open

debate. Significantly, too, the medium Orwell chooses for the espousal of frank views is the periodical.

Orwell's entry into the more general debate on literature and politics comes, appropriately, in a review, that of Philip Henderson's *The Novel Today*. The review appeared in the *New English Weekly* on New Year's Eve, 1936. Orwell describes Henderson's book as 'a survey of the contemporary novel from a Marxist standpoint', but considers it 'a weaker version of Mirsky's *Intelligentsia of Great Britain*'.⁵⁸ Mirsky, a Russian who had lived for a time in London, had written a scathing attack on British intellectuals upon his return to the Soviet Union. In Orwell's view, Henderson's analysis is weakened because he is

someone who has got to live in England and cannot afford to insult too many people . . . [and] is of some interest because it raises the question of art and propaganda which now rumbles like a sort of 'noises off' round every critical discussion.⁵⁹

Henderson's propriety, from Orwell's perspective, results not from good manners, but from intellectual dishonesty: the position 'that a book is only a "good" book if it teaches the right sermon'.⁶⁰ The religious terminology is not arbitrary, for Orwell sees this as a tendency of 'extremists at the opposite poles of thought, the Communist and the Catholic'. While highly critical of these orthodoxies, Orwell does not see them as being accepted universally. The 'official attitude' is still one he illustrates by means of an old Punch cartoon. It clearly made an impression, for Orwell recycles it three years later in 'Inside the Whale'. The cartoon depicts

an intolerable youth telling his aunt . . . he intended to 'write'. 'And what are you going to write about dear?' his aunt inquires. 'My dear aunt,' the youth replies crushingly, 'one doesn't write *about* anything, one just *writes*'.⁶¹

Officialdom preaches the code of aesthetic detachment, a drawing away from social reality; the writer is nothing more than a dilettante. Orwell ridicules this attitude, but more keenly attacks the tendentiousness of criticism which makes pretence to aesthetic criteria, while judging a book purely on the political or religious philosophy

espoused. The linking of Communist orthodoxy with that of Catholicism (a connection he also made in *The Road To Wigan Pier*) drives home the perverting effects of literary criticism which abdicates its aesthetic duty in favour of political prejudices.

The effects pervade beyond the boundaries of literary criticism or literature itself. Orthodoxy in one area necessarily infiltrates others. Orwell considers this

very depressing for anyone who cares for the cause of Socialism. For what is it except the most ordinary chauvinism turned upside down? It simply gives you the feeling that the Communist is no better than his opposite number.⁶²

In voicing these views, Orwell echoes the sentiments of Spender, Gibbon and others, who argued against the subjugation of literature to political doctrine.

Taking Sides on Spain

By the time the review was published, Orwell had arrived at the Lenin Barracks in Spain. His difficulties in getting his interpretation of events published are dealt with in Chapter Three, but it is worth considering Orwell's response to one of the main attempts to categorise the political position of writers: the pamphlet, *Authors Take Sides on The Spanish Civil War*.⁶³ The pamphlet was published by the *Left Review* in 1937. The Spanish Civil War was deemed a key moment for – and index of – the political sincerity of writers and activists. Those killed fighting in Spain, especially the talented youngsters like John Cornford, Julian Bell and Ralph Fox, quickly gained heroic status. Even for many who did not participate actively, the war provided a rallying point. For many, but not for all.

A questionnaire sent to writers by the *Left Review* attempted to gauge, and no doubt to generate, commitment. The replies eventually were issued as the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on The Spanish Civil War*. The ostensible aim of the questionnaire was simple – to discover the attitude of writers to the struggle in Spain. Writers were asked: 'Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the people of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?'. The questionnaire itself left no room for a misunderstanding of the severity of the situation:

It is clear to many of us throughout the whole world that now, as certainly never before, we are determined or compelled, to take sides. The equivocal attitude, the Ivory Tower, the paradoxical, the ironic detachment, will no longer do.⁶⁴

Faced with the passion of the call, 149 writers were said to have replied, amongst them such literary luminaries as T.S.Eliot, Ezra Pound, Sean O'Casey, Stephen Spender, Evelyn Waugh and W.H.Auden. Yet Valentine Cunningham plausibly casts doubt over the handling of replies, and their inclusion in one or other camp.⁶⁵ Of the 149 who replied, 127 were considered to have lined up 'for' the government, 5 'against', and 16 were classified as 'neutral'. Cunningham, however, detects an 'occasionally rough and ready . . . sorting of replies . . . in order to keep the Right side looking grotesquely underpopulated'.⁶⁶ Importantly, Cunningham notes that *Authors Take Sides* takes care not to name those who did not even choose to reply: their silence damaged the orthodoxy it promotes'.⁶⁷

One name not recorded was that of Orwell, who did reply, after a fashion. In a letter written to Stephen Spender a year after the pamphlet appeared, Orwell mentions 'that bloody rot which was afterwards published in book form [sic] (called *Authors Take Sides*). I sent back a very angry reply'.⁶⁸ The actual pamphlet provides no explanation for the omission of Orwell's contribution. Orwell's response was unusual, but not unique; Graham Greene did not reply, either. Nevertheless, it does signal an unwillingness to be press-ganged into service, even for a cause in which Orwell believed fervently.

Comparing Political Commitment: Orwell and Spender

Orwell's contact with I.L.P. members in Spain led eventually to his joining the party. 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', his declaration of allegiance, has been considered in other chapters. Here, it serves, with Stephen Spender's 'I Join the Communist Party', as a means by which to compare two writers struggling with the imperatives of literature and politics.⁶⁹ 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' is a highly personal statement, Orwell considering this to be the ' frankest ' approach. He states:

I am a writer. The impulse of every writer is to 'keep out of politics'. What he wants is to be left alone so that he can go on writing books in peace.⁷⁰

For someone who had only two months earlier published *Homage To Catalonia*, and whose previous book had been *The Road To Wigan Pier*, this statement is startling. Yet Orwell here does not argue that writers should not write about political concerns, simply that they desire not to actively participate in politics. Nevertheless, this is a contentious point.

The key to Orwell's deprecation of writers lies in the fact that the *New Leader* was the organ of a functioning and ostensibly radical political party. To 'take sides' on Spain with other writers is something different from joining a organisation which has members in the House of Parliament, and which aims (however naively) at fundamental change in the actual political landscape of Britain. For the I.L.P., Orwell's credentials as a writer are neither necessary nor sufficient. This explains his setting up of a straw man, the idealist writer, detached from political concerns, wishing merely to tend his garden. In order to overcome the scepticism of political activists towards a man of literature, Orwell presents them with a caricature, before setting it alight:

unfortunately it is becoming obvious that this ideal is no more practicable than that of the petty shopkeeper who hopes to preserve his independence in the teeth of the chain-stores.⁷¹

The analogy is almost comically domestic, but that domesticity displays, and is keen to display, Orwell's awareness of the practicalities of political existence.

The motive for writing the essay necessarily imposed pressures upon Orwell to confirm his loyalty to the I.L.P. In this way it shares several crucial features with another public political commitment, that of Stephen Spender to the Communist Party of Great Britain. Spender's declaration, 'I Join the Communist Party', requires contextualisation. In his autobiography he writes: 'In the winter of 1936 I was again taken up with politics'.⁷² He tells of meeting the Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt, in order to discuss Spender's *Forward From Liberalism*, the Left Book Club's Monthly Choice for January 1937. At this meeting, Pollitt proposed that, in order to help the Party's efforts in Spain, Spender should join the Party. As Spender almost flippantly describes it

[Pollitt], for his part, would be prepared to accept my disagreement [with criticism of *Forward From Liberalism*] on certain points. In

fact, he was willing for me to write an article in which I might put my point of view, to appear in the *Daily Worker* at the time when I joined.

I accepted this proposal, and Pollitt at once gave me a membership card.⁷³

Spender renders what seems startling political naivety without a hint of irony.

Spender's conversion to communism rated a small announcement on the front page of the *Daily Worker*.⁷⁴ The statement itself, 'I Join the Communist Party', appeared on page four, alongside the rather ominous greeting:

The Communist Party warmly welcomes Comrade Spender to its ranks as a leading representative of the growing army of all thinking people, writers, artists and intellectuals who are taking their stand with the working class in the issues of our epoch, and is confident that in life and work with our Party, Comrade Spender will reach complete unity with the outlook of Communism.⁷⁵

The statement largely is a defence of Spender's position (set down in *Forward from Liberalism*) against a negative review published in the *Daily Worker*. Spender recognises the shortcomings of this approach, noting: 'It was not merely as an answer to Comrade Campbell's review that I joined the Communist Party'.⁷⁶ He then tells of a trip to the Spanish Civil War which convinces him 'that it was necessary to make a choice between one international class representing imperialism, and the workers' inter-national'. This recognition leads to a decision:

It seems to me that the most important political aim of our time should be the United Front, organized so that it has a common interest with the Soviet and the Popular Fronts of Spain and France. I wish to belong to the party which is most active in working towards this end, and so I have joined the Communist Party.⁷⁷

Despite the assumed sincerity of the statement, it falls flat as a testament. In some ways it bears comparison with the naive idealism of Dylan Thomas, cited earlier. Thomas strikes a pose which wavers between the

heroic and the ludicrous, but even so exudes passion. Spender, on the other hand, though committed enough to join the 'revolutionary body of men' only flirted with by Thomas, appears uninspired; 'and so I have joined the Communist Party' suggests both a structural and political after-thought. Not surprisingly, as Spender relates in his autobiography, he later heard 'that several influential Communists had been indignant at my article and also at the terms on which I had been admitted into the Party'.⁷⁸

In sharp contrast to the almost off-hand convictions and justifications of Spender, in 'Why I Join the I.L.P.' Orwell places the writer firmly within a political context. He does this by emphasising centrality of the work of the writer to notions of liberty. The method is that of the contentious aphorism: 'To begin with, the era of free speech is closing down' – contentious both because it claims to predict, but also because it suggests that the era of free speech presently obtains.⁷⁹ Orwell immediately qualifies his point, but the aphorism has performed its function as a catalyst. Manipulating the reaction slightly, Orwell admits that 'freedom of the press in Britain was always something of a fake', but argues that, despite this, 'there are always loopholes for the unorthodox'.⁸⁰

In a few sentences Orwell establishes a tension between past, present and future: there was press freedom; there are loopholes; free speech will close down. Embedded in these tensions are qualifications, however, for press freedom had been fake, loopholes are for the unorthodox only, and the date for the closing of free speech is uncertain. Orwell acknowledges that British capitalists have paid him 'several pounds a week for writing against capitalism' but cautions that 'I do not delude myself that this state of affairs is going to last forever'.⁸¹

This series of qualifications threaten to undermine the menace of the closing down of free speech – what, for instance, if British capitalism continued to pay Orwell's stipend? The danger is revived by drawing comparisons with the loss of press freedoms in Italy and Germany, and the supposed inevitability of the same occurring in Britain:

The time is coming – not next year, perhaps not for ten or twenty years, but it is coming – where every writer will have the choice of being silenced altogether or of producing the dope that a privileged minority demands.⁸²

Orwell develops this point in the following paragraph, linking the intellectual threat of having to produce copy on demand to a physical threat:

'I have got to struggle against [the end of free speech], just as I have got to struggle against castor oil, rubber truncheons and concentration camps'.⁸³ Where Spender adopts the role of the concerned observer, Orwell commits himself (at least in print) to physical struggle. The potential role for the writer has changed, and Orwell maps it in personal terms:

In so far as I have struggled against the system, it has been mainly by writing books which I hoped would influence the reading public. I shall continue to do that, of course, but at a moment like the present writing books is not enough . . . One has got to be actively a Socialist, not merely sympathetic to Socialism.⁸⁴

Having sketched the inadequacies of his own previous position as a writer, Orwell argues forcefully for his decision to join the I.L.P. The main reason is stated plainly: 'I believe that the I.L.P. is the only party which, as a party, is likely to take the right line either against imperialist war or against Fascism when it appears in its British form'.⁸⁵ This simple declaration echoes that of Spender, but whereas Spender broadcasts his membership of the Communist Party apparently without qualms, Orwell adds a criticism of the party he has joined, stressing his disagreement with aspects of the I.L.P. policy on Spain. The party may have gained a committed new member, but not one who was compliant.

Inside the Whale

In May 1939 Orwell began the three essays that would eventually comprise the collection, *Inside the Whale*, published by Victor Gollancz in March of 1940. Though all deal with literature, each explores a particular territory: 'Charles Dickens' considers that writer and his works; 'Boys' Weeklies' examines pulp magazines for adolescent boys; 'Inside the Whale' exposes the dangers of political orthodoxy in literature. As if to emphasise their diversity, the latter two essays were published separately in literary periodicals, 'Boys' Weeklies' appearing in *Horizon*, 'Inside the Whale' in the American literary annual, *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*. Despite these differences, however, a common thread can be traced through the essays: the crucial interaction between society and the literature which it produces and consumes.

'Charles Dickens'

Superficially, this interaction might seem tenuous in an essay which so obviously faces back towards the nineteenth century. Yet 'Charles Dickens' is more than a mere extended piece of literary criticism, or a character study of the author, though it is both of these things. Orwell begins the essay with the intriguing, odd assertion that 'Dickens is one of those writers who is well worth stealing. Even his burial in Westminster Abbey is a kind of theft, if you come to think of it'.⁸⁶ Why should Dickens be worth stealing? For Orwell, the answer lies in the fact that Dickens's importance transcends simple categorisation. Or, perhaps more precisely, Dickens is important because he transcends simple categorisation.

The implied grave robbers are classic Burke and Hare figures in Orwell's list of villains: the Catholic and the Marxist. In his 1936 review of Philip Henderson's *The Novel Today* (analysed above) Orwell had abused both types as discarding aesthetic criteria for political orthodoxy in their literary assessments. In 'Charles Dickens', he argues that each desires to 'claim' Dickens: G.K.Chesterton

credit[s] Dickens with his own highly individual brand of medievalism. . . . [while a Marxist writer, T.A.Jackson] has made the spirited attempt to turn Dickens into a bloodthirsty revolutionary.⁸⁷

Orwell, by contrast, wants to analyse why Dickens should elicit advances from two such diverse suitors, while being able to elude the clutches of both.

This inquiry forms the framework of the essay. In the first and last parts of 'Charles Dickens', Orwell considers that writer's continued importance, while in the central sections aspects of Dickens's personality and novels are dealt with in detail: his fear of the proletariat; the melodramatic plots of his novels; the cartoonish simplifications of his characters; his lack of 'vulgar nationalism', amongst others. The portrait emerging is that of a complex, acute, though limited writer, a sharp observer of appearance, rather than a methodical or sophisticated thinker. Yet, what bonds these diverse elements together, and what to Orwell's mind makes Dickens relevant, is his sense of – and argument for – human decency.

Decency might easily be mistaken for decorum or gentility, but in Orwell's analysis the attribute has a critical cutting edge: he considers

Dickens as 'certainly a subversive writer, a radical, one might truthfully say a rebel'.⁸⁸ Orwell distinguishes this type from the revolutionary writer, one who hopes for the overthrow of a system. In contrast, Orwell notes, '[t]he truth is that Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral'.⁸⁹ Where the revolutionary agitates for a change in the system, Dickens argues for a change in the human heart.

This apparently simple distinction nonetheless carries complex implications, for while Dickens does not argue for institutional change, he does direct his moral critique at institutional authority. Where the revolutionary writer argues for the toppling of authority, and the overthrow of inhibiting systems, Orwell contends that Dickens's 'whole "message" is...: If men would behave decently the world would be decent'.⁹⁰ Recognising that this message 'at first glance looks like an enormous platitude', Orwell declares that it in fact calls into question the revolutionary's argument: 'Useless to change institutions without a "change of heart" – that, essentially, is what [Dickens] is always saying'.⁹¹

For Orwell, Dickens's message does not simply put the brake upon the revolutionary desire for fundamental change: it functions as a 'tenable' alternative. He suggests that neither position has logical pre-eminence. Instead, Orwell places both positions in a broader historical perspective, writing that

[t]hey appeal to different individuals, and they probably show a tendency to alternate in point of time. The moralist and the revolutionary are constantly undermining one another. Marx exploded a hundred tons of dynamite beneath the moralist position, and we are still living in the echo of that tremendous crash. But already, somewhere or other, the sappers are at work and fresh dynamite is being stamped in place to blow Marx at the moon. Then Marx, or somebody like him, will come back with yet more dynamite, and so the process continues, to an end we cannot yet foresee.⁹²

The first part of 'Charles Dickens' ends with the struggle between Marxian and Dickensian forces unresolved. Elevating Dickens to the level of Marx as a social critic underlines not only the importance of Dickens's moral standpoint for Orwell, but also the adversarial nature of that position. The grave-robbing Catholics and Marxists run to ground in the opening paragraphs of the essay are accused of enlisting Dickens for their respective causes. Orwell does this too, but he goes further,

positioning Dickens in the forefront of the fight against orthodoxies. Dickens's challenge to nineteenth-century authority is deemed by Orwell to carry sufficient weight to be used against Marx, the authority figure for many on the Left in twentieth-century Britain.

Taking up almost one third of the length of 'Charles Dickens', the first section dominates the argument of the essay. In the four sections which follow, Orwell analyses Dickens's literary output, noting shortcomings and strengths, while remaining sensitive to broader implications. In Part II he suggests that (like H. G. Wells) Dickens's urban bourgeois upbringing turns him agin' the aristocracy, while not making him more than vaguely for the urban proletariat.⁹³ This narrowness of Dickens's social vision has two aspects: 'in one way [it is] a great advantage to him, because it is fatal for a caricaturist to see too much'⁹⁴; necessarily, though, it confines Dickens to the level of a caricaturist, however great.

Comparing Dickens favourably with such xenophobic writers as Thackeray, Orwell notes as 'striking...especially considering the time he lived in, [Dickens's] lack of vulgar nationalism'.⁹⁵ Given Orwell's own stirring war-time call for the patriotic defence of Britain, this argument seems disingenuous. Orwell, however, was writing the *Inside the Whale* essays in 1939, at the same time as he was flailing both the British Empire (in 'Not Counting Niggers') and 'left-wing jingoes' (in 'Democracy in the British Army'). His disdain for vulgar nationalism in 'Charles Dickens' only reinforces the changes in his views in the following year. Keeping up the attack on his contemporaries on the Left, Orwell makes the wildly speculative, though juicily contentious claim, that 'if Dickens were alive today he would make a trip to Soviet Russia and come back with a book like Gide's *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*'.⁹⁶ As Orwell well knew, for some on the Left, Gide's critique of the Soviet Union earned him instant (if only metaphorical) deportation to an intellectual gulag.

In Part III, Orwell challenges the accepted notion that Dickens was 'a champion of the "oppressed masses"'.⁹⁷ While certainly a defender of sections of that group, Orwell argues that Dickens's support had crucial limits: as a 'south of England man' Dickens cannot relate 'to the bulk of the real oppressed masses, the industrial and agricultural labourers'; and 'Dickens's early experiences have given him a horror of proletarian roughness'.⁹⁸ Orwell cites an example of this horror, adding the contemporary thrust, '[i]n rather the same way the modern doctrinaire Socialist contemptuously writes off a large block of the population as "lumpenproletariat"'.⁹⁹ The injury neatly inflicted in mid-paragraph, Orwell continues,

His survey leads him, in the following section, to note that, for the most part, Dickens does not write about work. As a consequence, the plots of his novels become convoluted, in order that the desired character development can occur. Orwell also notes that Dickens is not mechanically minded, but while he finds this 'striking . . . in a seemingly "progressive" radical', he sees this as consistent with his general conception of Dickens, for

[Dickens] shows very little consciousness of the future. When he speaks of human progress it is usually in terms of *moral* progress – men growing better; probably he would never admit that men are only as good as their technological development allows them to be.¹⁰⁰

Orwell admits in Part V that his discussion to this point has dealt with Dickens's 'message' at the expense of his literary qualities. Yet, he argues, every writer has a message:

All art is propaganda. Neither Dickens himself nor the majority of Victorian novelists would have thought of denying this. On the other hand, not all propaganda is art.¹⁰¹

This insight leads Orwell to restate his earlier comment, that Dickens is well worth stealing. He asks what there is to steal; why does anyone care about Dickens? The answers he provides in the rest of Part V are rather banal: Dickens's ubiquitousness ('ladled' down the throats of children, buried in the subconscious of adults); the vivid eccentricities of his characters; his ability 'to reach simple people'.¹⁰² What makes this final point more interesting is Orwell's own comment, made four years previously in 'Bookshop Memories' (and cited above) that 'it is simply useless to put Charles Dickens [et al] into the ordinary lending library; nobody takes them out'. Saving a miraculous rise in Dickens's popularity between 1936 and 1940, Orwell would seem to have had a (convenient?) lapse of memory.

A full answer does not come until Part VI, the final section of 'Charles Dickens'. If Dickens were simply a comic writer, Orwell states, by now he would be forgotten. What motivated him, however, and what makes him memorable,

was simply the fact that he was a moralist . . . [conscious] of having 'something to say'. He is always preaching a sermon, and that is the

final secret of his inventiveness. For you can only create if you can *care*.¹⁰³

The highlighting of Dickens's qualities as a moralist in this final section of 'Charles Dickens' reprises the longer argument of Part I. Not surprisingly, Orwell revives the relationship between moral critique and radicalism, this time leavened by an understanding of Dickens's humour.

Orwell writes that

[a] joke worth laughing at always has an idea behind it, and usually a subversive idea. Dickens is able to go on being funny because he is in revolt against authority, and authority is always there to be laughed at. There is always room for one more custard pie.

His radicalism is of the vaguest kind, and yet one always knows it is there.¹⁰⁴

Again, Orwell distinguishes this moral radicalism from the revolutionary desire for systemic change. In this final section, however, he adds a caustic bite, arguing that '[m]ost revolutionaries are potential Tories, because they imagine that everything can be put right by altering the *shape* of society'.¹⁰⁵ Instead, as Orwell had noted earlier, Dickens calls for a change in human nature.

Stressing the differences in these positions, Orwell emphasises Dickens's ability to communicate to a broad audience. In fact, Orwell declares

[t]he common man [sic] is still living in the mental world of Dickens, but nearly every modern intellectual has gone over to some or other form of totalitarianism. From the Marxist or Fascist point of view, nearly all of Dickens can be written off as 'bourgeois morality' But in his own age and ours he has been popular chiefly because he was able to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man.¹⁰⁶

Whatever the uses to which Catholics or Marxists may put Dickens, for Orwell he functions almost as a means of political and social classification: on the one side, totalitarianism, Tories, Fascists, Marxists, and the belief in the benefits of systemic change; on the other, Dickens, decency, moral radicalism, common humanity, and Orwell.

Clearly, Orwell is attempting more in 'Charles Dickens' than an extended literary analysis. He ends the essay with an imagined portrait of Dickens, the

face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is *generously angry* – in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls.¹⁰⁷

Taking Dickens as an exemplary free intelligence naturally calls into question those willing to subscribe to the smelly little orthodoxies. The fact that Dickens is a nineteenth-century liberal only emphasises the long term decline of free and fearless argument. For Orwell, at least, Dickens is the measure of the shortcomings of modern writers; their failure to fight openly and without fear. He develops this attack at greater length in 'Inside the Whale'.

'Boys' Weeklies'

As part of his argument for Socialism, Orwell had called upon left-wing writers to produce intelligent propaganda. For the most part, 'Boys' Weeklies' analyses what could be called unintelligent propaganda, the kind dominating boys' twopenny weeklies.¹⁰⁸ Unintelligent does not signify unsuccessful, however; weeklies such as *Magnet* and *Gem* might recreate a world of stereotypes perpetually frozen in 1910, but they remained an immensely popular form of mass entertainment. While Orwell admits to finding this a 'rather startling phenomenon'¹⁰⁹ in the 1930s, he recognises the potential for the inculcation of conservative values. In contrast, he argues, 'in England, popular imaginative literature is a field that left-wing thought has never begun to enter'.¹¹⁰ Orwell desires that it does so.

Though he documents specific weeklies, Orwell repeatedly pulls back from this sharp focus to a wide-angle shot, attempting to assess the social impact and importance of seemingly unimportant literature. For example, after detailing the contents of the average small newsagent, he makes the larger claim that '[p]robably the contents of these shops is the best available indication of what the mass of the English people really think and feel'.¹¹¹ The qualifying 'probably' is significant, for

many of the broader claims risk shading into banal generalisation. As always, the essay form allows Orwell the benefits of generality without the responsibility of substantiating detail.

Concentrating upon twopenny boys' weeklies goes part way to guarding against such generalisation. The focus has a more positive aspect, however, for Orwell states that 'the combined public of the ten papers [analysed in 'Boy's Weeklies'] is a very large one'.¹¹² As such, they constitute an influential medium for the transmission of values. Given Orwell's own use of the (adult) periodical as a means of publicising his ideas, his sensitivity to the propaganda potential of seemingly innocuous and vacuous papers as *Magnet* and *Gem* should not come as a surprise.

Orwell distinguishes two general types of weekly for boys: the long-established purveyor of public school shenanigans, and the racier post-1914 adventure model. His comparison of the two becomes important later on in the essay, but in the early pages of 'Boys' Weeklies' he attempts to designate the peculiar elements and attractions of the older type. Interestingly, he notes a crucial element in their success as the creation of an unchanging though 'extraordinary little world . . . not easily forgotten'; a world he recognises as 'the debasement of the Dickens technique'.¹¹³ Perhaps because of 'Charles Dickens' in the same collection, he does not develop this point. Certainly, if moral radicalism is at work in *Magnet*, it is of a debased sort.

A 'curious fact' Orwell spots as regards the public school-based weeklies is that they are 'peculiar to England'.¹¹⁴ This he considers the result of class factors; education functions as a dividing line between rich and poor, and the weeklies emphasise the 'unbridgeable gulf between the "public" school and the "private" school'. They do this by portraying 'life at a "posh" public school as wildly thrilling and romantic'.¹¹⁵ The surprisingly broad readership of the weeklies, which Orwell claims includes members of the lower-middle and working classes, ensures that the portrait gains a wide public viewing.

While recognising that the general political standpoint of both *Gem* and *Magnet* is Conservative, Orwell judges that it is of 'a completely pre-1914 style, with no Fascist tinge. In reality, their basic political assumptions are two: nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny'.¹¹⁶ He adds that both papers are patriotic, but makes the interesting qualification that 'their patriotism has nothing whatever to do with power politics or "ideological" warfare. It is more akin to family loyalty'.¹¹⁷ More than a year before he himself (in 'The Lion and The Unicorn') was to describe England as 'a family with the wrong members in control',

Orwell considers that the patriotism of *Gem* and *Magnet* provides a 'valuable clue to the attitude of ordinary people'. These people, Orwell assesses, are

patriotic to the middle of their bones When England is in danger they rally to its defence as a matter of course, but in between times they are not interested. England is always in the right and England always wins, so why worry? It is an attitude that has been shaken during the past twenty years, but not so deeply as is sometimes supposed. Failure to understand it is one of the reasons why left-wing political parties are seldom able to produce an acceptable foreign policy.¹¹⁸

The passage exemplifies the way in which Orwell uses the specific focus of 'Boys' Weeklies' as a starting point for larger topics, judging the success of Left foreign policy by considering the patriotism of *The Magnet*.

The static, soporific Conservatism of the established weeklies contrasts in Orwell's view with their post-1914 counterparts. By ranging widely beyond the school story, the latter 'have far greater opportunity for sensationalism', especially in terms of the newly-included scientific theme.¹¹⁹ Orwell writes that '[w]hereas the *Gem* and *Magnet* derive from Dickens and Kipling, the *Wizard*, *Champion*, *Modern Boy*, etc., owe a great deal to H.G.Wells'.¹²⁰ Given his own championing of Dickens, Orwell's sympathies are plain. He emphasises this in noting the emergence 'in the post-war boys papers, though not by anything like the extent one would expect, [of] bully-worship and the cult of violence'.¹²¹

As distinct from the early papers, the post-war weeklies glorify the strong leader, a character 'intended as a superman'.¹²² Tempering this rampant sadism, Orwell notes, is the fact that 'the scenes of violence in all these stories are remarkably harmless and unconvincing'.¹²³ The same cannot be said, however, for their American counterparts, and in this lies a danger, for

the process of Amercanisation is going on The American ideal, the 'he-man', the 'tough guy', the gorilla who puts everything right by socking everybody else on the jaw, now figures in a majority of boys' papers. In one serial now running in the *Skipper* he is always portrayed, ominously enough, swinging a rubber truncheon.¹²⁴

For rubber truncheon, read also castor oil, and totalitarianism.

Despite the lurking menace of totalitarianism, Orwell notes that, for the most part, contemporary politics and social movements are excluded from the weeklies: 'The clock has stopped at 1910. Britannia still rules the waves, and no one has heard of slumps, booms, unemployment, dictatorship, purges or concentration camps'.¹²⁵ This prompts the question, what does it matter? In response, Orwell again moves from the specifics of boys' weeklies to a more general social critique in arguing that

[p]ersonally I believe that most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth, and that from this point of view the worst books are often the most important, because they are usually the ones that are read earliest in life [readers of boys' weeklies] are absorbing a set of beliefs which are considered hopelessly out of date in the Central Office of the Conservative Party.¹²⁶

From this angle the vacuous . . . anachronisms of such papers as The Magnet take on a decidedly political aspect: 'Considering who owns these papers,' Orwell declares, 'it is difficult to believe that this is unintentional'.¹²⁷ The propaganda of the Conservatives might not be particularly intelligent, but its ubiquity suggests that it could be successful. Inevitably, Orwell asks 'why is there no such thing as a left-wing boys' paper', and while the question allows him to lampoon the lame didacticism of sections of the Left, the question has a serious purpose.¹²⁸

Orwell claims to have seen examples of Left-leaning popular literature in Spain.¹²⁹ He also cites a current Soviet film, *Chapayev*, as having 'all the usual paraphernalia . . . heroic fight against odds, escape at the last moment, love interest, comic relief . . . except that its tendency is "left"'.¹³⁰ These illustrations of the type of thing Orwell argues for, from countries with unimpeachable left-wing credentials, contrasts with the situation in England, where 'popular imaginative literature is a field that left-wing thought has never begun to enter'. Orwell ends 'Boys' Weeklies' by reiterating the fact that Conservative publishers have not failed to grasp the propaganda opportunity. He chides the Left with the sarcastic statement that this

is only unimportant if one believes that what is read in childhood leaves no impression behind. Lord Camrose and his colleagues

evidently believe nothing of the kind, and, after all, Lord Camrose and his colleagues should know.¹³¹

As he did in 'Charles Dickens', Orwell in 'Boys' Weeklies' combines a detailed study of an ostensibly literary topic with a critique of contemporary political attitudes, especially those on the Left. In both essays the main focus is a genuine concern of Orwell: he had re-read Dickens in order to research the first essay, and maintained a life-long interest in seemingly ephemeral popular literature, especially pamphlets. In neither essay, however, does he stay within the boundaries marked out by their respective titles. Even so, the attacks on the shortcomings of the political and literary Left in Britain have to be teased out (sometimes with little effort) from the larger argument. In 'Inside the Whale', no such teasing is required.

'Inside The Whale'

The title essay was also published in the 1940 American anthology, *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*. *New Directions* depicted itself as 'an annual volume of "advance-guard" literature – an exhibition gallery where young writers offer their "new directions" to the public'.¹³² First published in 1936, it had included in its yearly collections the works of Jean Cocteau, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Lawrence Durrell, Dylan Thomas and Henry Miller. The critical analysis of Miller which underpins 'Inside The Whale', as well as comparisons between British and American authors which occur in the essay, slots into the general concerns of *New Directions*.

The structure of 'Inside the Whale' is crucial to an understanding of the argument Orwell sets down. The first of three sections comprises an analysis of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in which the book is considered as anachronistic, but worth consideration. The second contains an historical survey of twentieth century British literature, at the heart of which lies a searing attack upon the left-wing orthodoxy of many young writers. The third section returns to Miller, comparing his quietist acceptance of the collapse of civilisation with the impassioned stance of Marxist-leaning writers; Edward Upward and Louis MacNeice are singled out for special abuse. Ultimately, Orwell comes down on the side of Miller, contending that Miller recognised before others that

literature, in the form in which we know it, must suffer at least a temporary death.¹³³

Miller's importance for Orwell is that he functions as a symbol of that temporary death, 'a sort of Whitman amongst the corpses'.¹³⁴ As such, his significance lies in demonstrating 'the *impossibility* of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into its new shape'.¹³⁵

That statement bears a striking similarity to one written for the first number of *Horizon* by Cyril Connolly. The much-quoted phrase: 'Our standards are aesthetic and our politics are in abeyance' might be taken as proof of the periodical's artistic detachment. However, the statement continues:

This will not always be the case, because as events take shape the policy of artists and intellectuals will become clearer, the which leads them to economic security, to the atmosphere in which they can create, and to the audience by whom they will be appreciated.

At the moment civilization is on the operating table and we sit in the waiting room.¹³⁶

If there is detachment it is of a temporary and limited type. A similar sense informs 'Inside the Whale'. The circumstances of war undeniably crush individual action, but even so Connolly is able to contemplate a time after the operation when life can continue. For Orwell, too, the death literature will suffer might only be temporary.

Orwell's championing of Miller in 'Inside the Whale' hinges not on Miller's ghoulish nihilism, but on the fact that he faces reality without fear. In Miller's case, this happens to involve the collapse of Western civilisation. 'Good novels,' Orwell writes, 'are written by people who are *not frightened*'.¹³⁷ He makes the same point in 'Charles Dickens', but the essential difference between Miller and Dickens is that Miller will not fight. Instead, he withdraws inside the metaphorical whale, into 'a womb big enough for an adult'.¹³⁸

Given the sense of impending oppression running through 'Inside the Whale', it is unsurprising that central to the rhetoric of the essay is the notion of time. Orwell begins his critique of *Tropic of Cancer* by dodging the issue of its sexual explicitness and instead noting that the book was praised by writers (Eliot, Pound, Huxley and others) who are not 'in fashion'.¹³⁹ This sparks an important point, that 'in fact the subject-matter of the book, and to a certain extent its mental atmosphere,

belong to the twenties rather than the thirties'.¹⁴⁰ Superficially, the choice of a book designated as anachronistic is baffling, but Orwell intends to praise, not vilify, that anachronism. The roll-call of the unfashionable defenders of the book reinforce this approach. Orwell goes on to argue that one of the defining principles of the now unfashionable writer was the truthful depiction of society. Miller's strength therefore is his ability to set down the facts of human existence (or, the small section of it to which he belongs) vividly and faithfully. Orwell draws a comparison, one used in his earlier reviews, between Miller's work and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Though keen to make the necessary distinctions between Joyce and Miller, he sees them as both capable of writing 'a novel which opens up a new world not by revealing what is strange, but by revealing what is familiar'.¹⁴¹ It is this, what Orwell soon after describes as the 'recognisable experience of human beings', that he values in the anachronistic writers.

Miller's individuality also links him with those, like Eliot, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, D.H. Lawrence and others, who comprise 'the movement' of the middle and late twenties. Orwell argues that 'the first thing to notice about the group . . . is that they do not look like a group. Moreover several would strongly object to being coupled with several of the others'.¹⁴² In the second part of the essay, Orwell contrasts this with the group mentality of those he takes to comprise 'the movement' of the thirties, 'the Auden-Spender group'. With the twenties writers,

what 'purpose' they have is very much up in the air. There is no attention to the urgent problems of the moment, above all no politics in the narrower sense.¹⁴³

Orwell contrasts this with the situation obtaining in the thirties:

Suddenly we have got out of the twilight of the gods into a sort of Boy Scout atmosphere of bare knees and community singing. The typical literary man ceases to be a cultured expatriate with a leaning towards the Church, and becomes an eager-minded schoolboy with a leaning towards Communism.¹⁴⁴

This caricature of the 'typical literary man' of the thirties is highly generalised and tendentious. This is intentional; for Orwell, the stakes are high. He sees in the rise of 'orthodoxy sniffers' the passing of liberalism and the potential triumph of the mental enslavement of totalitarianism.

'Inside the Whale' should be seen as an attempt to smash the shackles of totalitarian thought.

Orwell questions why young writers of the thirties turned to an ideology dominated by foreign ideas. Furthermore, he asks, '[w]hy should *writers* be attracted by a form of Socialism that makes mental honesty impossible?'.¹⁴⁵ Orwell's answer, 'middle class unemployment', seems curious, but by this he means unemployment of talent and a consequent lack of belief. Communism, Orwell declares,

was simply something to believe in. Here was a church, an army, an orthodoxy, a discipline. Here was a Fatherland and – at any rate since 1935 or thereabouts – a Fuehrer. All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises. Patriotism, religion, empire, military glory – all in one word, Russia. Father, king, leader, hero, saviour – all in one word – Stalin. The devil – Hitler. Heaven – Moscow. Hell – Berlin It is the patriotism of the deracinated.¹⁴⁶

Such 'patriotism', Orwell charges, determined that 'by 1937 the whole of the intelligentsia was mentally at war'.¹⁴⁷ Anti-Fascism provided a mask for ideological control, the retailing of lies, the attempted suppression of opposition. Ultimately, these efforts failed 'because the actual course of events has made nonsense of the left-wing orthodoxy of the last few years'.¹⁴⁸ Orwell warns, however, that the next orthodoxy might not be any improvement on the last. Envisaging the possibility that such an orthodoxy might be totalitarian, Orwell suggests that literature produced under such a regime 'will be quite different from anything we can now imagine. Literature as we know it is an individual thing, demanding mental honesty and a minimum of censorship'.¹⁴⁹

This perception underpins Orwell's central argument, that 'good novels are not written by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own unorthodoxy'; hence his championing of Henry Miller.¹⁵⁰ Miller functions as a harbinger for the end of liberalism and the age of totalitarianism Orwell senses in the wind. What sets Miller apart is that he faces the end of civilisation squarely; he fiddles while Rome burns, but 'unlike the majority of people who do this, fiddling with his face towards the flames'.¹⁵¹

Employing the image which gives the essay its title, Orwell notes Miller's desire to accept the destruction, to withdraw metaphysically inside the belly of a whale, as did the biblical Jonah. Orwell appreciates this desire,

for 'being inside a whale is a very comfortable, cosy, homelike thought'.¹⁵² Such comfort and homeliness contrasts to the bleak scenario Orwell paints in 1939 of the future:

Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships – an age in which freedom of thought will be at first a deadly sin and later on a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence. But this means that literature, in the form in which we know it, must suffer at least a temporary death.¹⁵³

In such a world, a whale's belly must be a tempting prospect.

The picture thus painted would seem unremittingly grim were it not for two qualifications: the age of dictatorships is only 'almost' certain, and literature might suffer only a 'temporary death'. The future to some extent remains provisional, the gloomy timetable loose. In 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', written little more than a year earlier, Orwell had predicted something similar, though 'not next year [he was correct], perhaps not for ten or twenty years'. For the present, he suggests,

[s]eemingly there is nothing left but quietism – robbing reality of its terror by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale – or rather, admit that you are inside the whale (for you *are*, of course). Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it: simply accept it, endure it record it.¹⁵⁴

While the quietism favoured by Miller is presented as a plausible option, it is not given as the only available stance; the qualifier, 'seemingly', undercuts any certainty. Interestingly, too, the recording function is that recommended to the writer by Storm Jameson in her essay, 'Documents', analysed in the chapter on Socialism. Furthermore, endurance suggests a test that can be survived. Jonah did, after all, eventually leave the whale. Nor is Orwell's praise for Miller unmitigated: he does not consider Miller 'a new hope for English prose'.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Orwell describes him as 'essentially a man of one book'.¹⁵⁶ Though that book, *Tropic of Cancer*, is 'important', that importance does not derive from technical innovation, or because it exposes a terrible wrong: 'Its importance is merely symptomatic'.¹⁵⁷

Yet, of what is *Tropic of Cancer* symptomatic? Orwell places Miller in

the exalted company of Joyce because (as cited above) both describe 'the recognisable experience of human beings'. For Joyce, this entails the reconstruction at many levels of the experience of Dublin's denizens. Miller's passivity, on the other hand, allows him

to get nearer to the ordinary man [sic] than is possible for more purposive writers. For the ordinary man is also passive. Within a narrow circle (home life, and perhaps the trade union or local politics) he feels himself the master of his fate, but against major events he is as helpless as against the elements. So far from endeavouring to influence the future, he simply lies down and lets things happen to him.¹⁵⁸

In Orwell's view, ordinary people have already taken up residence in the whale's belly. Miller's book records that passivity; Miller himself personifies the creed.

Orwell's patronising depiction of mass passivity was to be proved wrong in the event. Indeed, Orwell questioned his own argument even before *Inside the Whale* was published. In a letter to his publisher, Victor Gollancz, he admits that Gollancz might be right in considering Orwell's predictions 'over-pessimistic'. He continues that 'it is quite possible that freedom of thought etc. may survive in an economically totalitarian society'.¹⁵⁹ This view seems radically at odds with the gloomy forecasts made in the book itself. Yet the discrepancy is explained by the further comment that

[w]hat worries me at present is the uncertainty as to whether the ordinary people of countries like England grasp the difference between democracy and despotism well enough to want to defend their liberties The intellectuals who are at present pointing out that democracy and fascism are the same thing etc. depress me horribly. However, perhaps when the pinch comes the common people will turn out to be more intelligent than the clever ones. I certainly hope so.¹⁶⁰

As previous chapters have detailed, when the pinch came, the common people showed intelligence and determination enough. As Orwell's letter to Gollancz reveals, the essays in *Inside the Whale* were written for readers on the brink of war, and experiencing the early days of the 'phoney war'.

The argument of 'Inside the Whale', especially, was conditioned by the need to provoke and to warn. Unfortunately, the collection sold only around a thousand copies. Despite favourable notices by as eminent a critic as Q.D. Leavis, *Inside the Whale* can have been read by only a very few common people.¹⁶¹ Ironically, while both 'Charles Dickens' and 'Boys' Weeklies' also enjoyed the wider readership of the periodicals in which they appeared, the most impassioned essay of the three lay hidden away, literally inside *Inside the Whale*.

Literary Essays in *The Listener*

'Literature and Totalitarianism', the last of Orwell's 1941 B.B.C. talks on the Overseas Service, was examined in Chapter Four. As noted there, the talks were printed as essays in the B.B.C. periodical, *The Listener*. The earlier essays are less substantial than 'Literature and Totalitarianism': the first reprises several arguments; the basic premise is exemplified in the other two. Consequently, the three can be dealt with quickly as a group.

In 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', Orwell surveys literary criticism in Britain over the preceding ten years.¹⁶² Not surprisingly, he repeats arguments from 'Inside the Whale', as well as opinions expressed as far back as his 1936 review of Philip Henderson's *The Novel Today*. Indeed, he uses similar phraseology: where in the original review he had criticised Henderson for considering that 'a book is only a "good" book if it preaches the right sermon', in 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' he damns Edward Upward for asserting 'that books can be "good" only when they are Marxist in tendency'.¹⁶³

Orwell also reprises the distinction made in 'Inside the Whale' between the aesthetic writers of the twenties (Pound, Eliot, Joyce, et al) and the 'didactic, political writers' of the thirties (Auden, Spender, MacNeice, et al). He does soften his attack on the latter group, acknowledging that

[i]n a world in which Fascism and Socialism were fighting one another, any thinking person had to take sides . . . Literature had to become political, because anything else would have entailed mental dishonesty.¹⁶⁴

While this appears to go against Orwell's strongly stated position in

'Inside the Whale', that the thirties showed that writers should stay out of politics, a change of stance should by now come as little surprise. Orwell in fact tempers his forgiveness by arguing that the imposition of political orthodoxy 'led for the time being into a blind alley'¹⁶⁵; forgiven, but not forgotten.

Nevertheless, Orwell does see a benefit in the politicisation of literature in the thirties, in that the 'art for art's sake' orthodoxy of the twenties has been undermined. The collapse of that position in turn reveals that

propaganda, in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose – a political, literary and religious purpose – that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs.¹⁶⁶

In that revelation no correct political or aesthetic path, no 'discoverable literary trend' is made manifest. Importantly, however, the understanding of the purpose behind art has the salutary effect of helping 'to define, better than was possible before, the frontiers of art and propaganda'.¹⁶⁷ For a writer such as Orwell, ever sensitive to the threats and potential of propaganda, this ability to define marks a fundamental and necessary advance.

In Tolstoy and Shakespeare¹⁶⁸ Orwell modifies his argument somewhat, in examining an essay in which Tolstoy attacks Shakespeare.¹⁶⁸ While every work of art has an underlying purpose, reducing criticism to the analysis of these underpinnings creates fresh biases; Orwell denies that 'there is no such thing as an aesthetic judgement'.¹⁶⁹ Tolstoy's essay exemplifies the dangers. Orwell accepts Tolstoy's charge that Shakespeare was not a great thinker, that his plots often stretch plausibility, that his characters can be inconsistent. He counters, however, that while Tolstoy succeeds in demolishing Shakespeare as a thinker and teacher, while, in other words, he undercuts whatever 'political, social and religious purpose' Shakespeare may have, Shakespeare survives the attack.

The reason why he survives, according to Orwell, is that Tolstoy ignores Shakespeare's gifts as a poet; and, as a poet, Shakespeare remains inviolable:

Evidently a poet is more than a thinker and a teacher, though he has to be that as well. Every piece of writing has its propaganda aspect, and yet in any book or play or poem or what not that is to endure there has to be a residuum of something that simply is not

affected by its moral or meaning – a residuum of something we can only call art.¹⁷⁰

'Tolstoy and Shakespeare' is too short an essay for any attempt to define what the residual something might be which constitutes art; it must remain less defined (and perhaps definable) than 'purpose'.

In the third of *The Listener* essays, 'The Meaning of a Poem', Orwell attempts to exemplify the interaction of aesthetics and social or political imperatives in a page-long piece of literary criticism.¹⁷¹ He deliberately selects 'Felix Randal', by Gerard Manley Hopkins, on the grounds that, in criticism on Hopkins, the *Listener* reader (and, presumably, the Overseas Service audience) 'will usually find all the emphasis laid on his use of language and his subject-matter very lightly touched on'.¹⁷² While accepting that in poetry criticism, 'it seems natural to judge primarily by the ear', Orwell declares that a poem is not

simply a pattern of words on paper, like a sort of mosaic. The poem is moving because of its sound, its musical qualities, but it is also moving because of an emotional content which would not be there if Hopkins's philosophy and belief were different from what they were.¹⁷³

Orwell goes on to detail how much of the emotional content derives from Hopkins's Catholicism, made more potent by the decline of the English rural life he mourns in 'Felix Randal'. Yet, in Hopkins at least, the emotional and the technical cannot be severed without damaging the poem. Furthermore, Orwell considers that while the poem is a synthesis of these elements, it is something more,

a sort of growing together – of a special vocabulary and a special religious and social outlook. The two fuse together, inseparably, and the whole is greater than the parts.¹⁷⁴

'The Meaning of A Poem' can be seen as a the working through of ideas introduced in 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' and slightly expanded and modified in 'Tolstoy and Shakespeare'. The earliest essay cheered the debunking of the 'art for art's sake' lobby, at the same time foregrounding the the importance of political and social purpose. That argument set out, Orwell then warns in 'Tolstoy and Shakespeare' of

the dangers (even for someone as perceptive as Tolstoy) of a too-rigid application of the search for purpose. Finally, in 'The Meaning of a Poem', he exemplifies the benefits to literary criticism of tempering aesthetic judgement with a broader socio-political understanding. Like the literary criticism under scrutiny, the three small essays, in one sense separate fragments, combine to form a more complex interpretive whole.

'Why Not War Writers?'

If the boundaries between art and propaganda were difficult to define, the role for writers in war-time Britain was riddled with uncertainty. Orwell's own activities in the early part of the war entailed fruitless attempts to sign up for military duties, editing the Searchlight Books series, occasional reviews and essays, and membership of the Home Guard. In an effort to clarify the role of writers, Orwell supported a manifesto, 'Why Not War Writers' prepared by young writers 'both in the Forces, and in other work of national importance'.¹⁷⁵ The Manifesto appeared in the October 1941 number of *Horizon*. The young writers went unnamed, and the manifesto was 'published on their behalf' by established writers including Cyril Connolly, Arthur Koestler, Alun Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Orwell.¹⁷⁶

The immediate purpose of the manifesto was to publicise the argument that '[t]he role of writers to-day, when every free nation and every free man and woman is threatened by the Nazi war-machine, is a matter of supreme importance'.¹⁷⁷ The fact that this has to be stated suggests that the public at large (as represented by *Horizon* readers) saw the importance of the writer's role as less than supreme. Set out in 'Why Not War Writers?' is an argument for the value of creative writing, an argument against distinguishing between creative writers and journalists, and a call for Government support for writers. More specifically, the manifesto contains four proposals:

1. The formation of an official group of war writers.
2. Writers to be given the necessary facilities for writing their books.
3. The international exchange of writers to be encouraged and accelerated.
4. A proper proportion of these writers to be of groups most actively engaged in the war.¹⁷⁸

Despite (or perhaps because of) the boldness of the proposals, and possibly because *Horizon's* clout extended little beyond its covers, 'Why Not War Writers?' had no effect on the status of writers, nor did it generate Government assistance. *Horizon's* editor, Cyril Connolly, described the enterprise as '*Horizon's* most lost of lost causes'.¹⁷⁹

Ironically, one response the manifesto did receive was scathingly derisive; it came from a *Horizon* reader. Adopting the beautifully belligerent pseudonym, 'Combatant', the writer proceeds to assault the 'preposterous document' and its authors.¹⁸⁰ Rather than forming official groups, 'Combatant' declares, the writers should fight, for though '[t]he atmosphere is uncongenial for writing . . . that is all to the good. It has been too easy in recent years. Genius overcomes privation and inferiority'.¹⁸¹ What 'Combatant' suspects, however, is that such writers would instead rather

go on jaunts to the Americas and Dominions; they would have the facilities of journalists' which, as I have seen, merely means the privileges of commissioned officers without its obligations . . .

I am afraid that I do not believe for a moment that these young men want to write; they want to be writers.¹⁸²

If the bayonet sharpness of 'Combatant's' pen does nothing else, it pierces through to the problematic status of writers in 1941. Yet much the same had been true for most of the preceding decade. Writers were constantly called upon to sign manifestoes, to join organisations, to adopt a stance on important political issues, to write for certain periodicals. The option remained not to join, sign, or write, and periodicals were founded with the specific purpose of keeping the dogs of political orthodoxy at bay. Yet, when to eschew overt political dogmas was itself to adopt a political position, writers repeatedly were called upon to take sides. Nevertheless, amongst periodicals there was more than one orthodoxy: *The Adelphi*, *Left Review*, *New Writing*, and *Horizon* (amongst many others) had different barrows to push. These were pointed in a variety of directions over time; collisions were to be expected.

As already noted, Orwell was relatively late in joining the fray, at least compared to such contemporaries as Stephen Spender; still, he saw plenty of action. Indeed, the fact that positions had already been established aided Orwell, for (as in other debates) it gave him something to argue against, as means of defining his own position. Significantly,

one of his earliest acts was a form of non-action; by refusing to complete the *Authors Take Sides on The Spanish Civil War* questionnaire, he set himself apart from many to whom politically he was close. Yet, as Lewis Grassie Gibbon's attack on the Writers' International Group shows, he was not alone in attempting to distinguish himself from the pack. This does not mean that his was an easy stance to adopt.

Like many writers, Orwell recognised that the triumph of totalitarianism threatened not just his own writing, but literature and free thought generally. Where he differs from many of his contemporaries is in seeing the germs of that ideology in Soviet Communism as well as Fascism. In Spain he witnessed the attempt to stifle political freedom of thought, and in joining the I.L.P. he signals the importance of such freedom to the production of literature. This idea permeates the essays collected in *Inside the Whale*, so that, whatever their failings, such free thinkers as Charles Dickens and Henry Miller are to be favoured over those writers willing to bow down to smelly little orthodoxies.

Notes

- 1 George Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, *The Complete Orwell: Volume Five*, edited by Peter Davison (London, 1986), p. 170.
- 2 George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', in *Inside the Whale & Other Essays* [sic] (London, 1940), 129–88 (p. 172). *CEJL I*, 493–527 (p. 518).
- 3 George Orwell, 'Literature and Totalitarianism', *The Listener*, 19 June 1941, p. 882. *CEJL II*, 134–7 (pp. 135–6).
- 4 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 171.
- 5 John Middleton Murry, 'Communism and Art: or Bolshevism and Ballyhoo', *The Adelphi* (January 1933), pp. 261–70.
- 6 Orwell mentions *Burmese Days* in *The Road To Wigan Pier*, p. 136, and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, p. 142.
- 7 George Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 24 June 1938, p. 4. *CEJL I*, 336–8, (p. 337).
- 8 Figures for *Inside the Whale & Other Essays* in I.R. Willison, 'George Orwell: Some Materials for a Bibliography' (unpublished dissertation, University of London, 1953), p. 34. Figures for *Horizon* in Michael Shelden, *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and The World of Horizon* (London, 1989), p. 1.
- 9 In *New Directions in Poetry and Prose 1941*, edited by James Laughlin (Connecticut, 1941), p. 758, it is stated that '[t]he "New Directions" of England is "New Writing"'.
- 10 'The Proletarian Writer', a talk between George Orwell and Desmond Hawkins, broadcast on B.B.C. Home Service, 6 December 1940; published in *The Listener*, 19 December 1940, pp. 878–9. *CEJL II*, pp. 38–44.
- 11 For circulation figures, see Chapter Four, footnote 112.

- 12 'Why Not War Writers: A Manifesto', *Horizon* (October 1941), pp. 236-9.
- 13 C.Day Lewis, 'The Poet and Revolution', *The Adelphi* (September 1932), pp. 862-3.
- 14 Murry, 'Communism', pp. 266-8.
- 15 Murry, 'Communism', p. 270.
- 16 John Cornford, 'Left?', *Cambridge Left* (Winter 1933-4), 25-9 (p. 26).
- 17 Cornford, p. 25.
- 18 'A Note on Poetry and Politics', *Cambridge Left* (Summer 1933), p. 10.
- 19 Donald Maclean, review of R.D.Charque, *Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution*, *Cambridge Left* (Winter 1933-4), ii-iii (p. iii).
- 20 Helen Davis and H.V.Kemp, 'The Rise and Fall of Bourgeois Poetry', *Cambridge Left*, Part I (Spring 1934), pp. 68-77; Part II (Summer 1934), 93-100 (p. 93).
- 21 J.P.Tuck, 'English Criticism and the Soviet Writers' Congress', *Cambridge Left* (Autumn 1934), 4-13 (pp. 11-12). See also Marie Seaton, 'The Evolution of the Soviet Theatre, And the Festival Theatre', *Cambridge Left* (Summer 1934), pp. 101-6, for a rose-spectacled view of Soviet theatre.
- 22 Writers' International (British Section) Statement, in *Left Review* (October 1934), p. 37.
- 23 Writers' International Statement, p. 37.
- 24 Alec Brown, reply to Writers' International Statement, *Left Review* (December 1934), 76-7 (p. 76).
- 25 Stephen Spender, 'Writers and Manifestoes', *Left Review* (February 1935), 145-50 (p. 149).
- 26 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, reply to Writers' International Statement, *Left Review* (February 1935), 179-80 (p. 179).
- 27 Grassic Gibbon, p. 179.
- 28 Georg Dimitrov, 'Dimitrov to Writers: A Speech before the Soviet Writers' Association', *Left Review* (June 1935), 343-6 (p. 345).
- 29 'Editorial', *The Modern Scot* (Spring 1930), p. 5.
- 30 'Scrutiny: A Manifesto', *Scrutiny* (May 1932), 2-7 (p. 3).
- 31 Geoffrey Grigson, 'Why', *New Verse* (January 1933), 1-2 (p. 2).
- 32 'Politics: And a Request', *New Verse* (March 1933), 1-2 (p. 1).
- 33 'Poetry To-Day: An Enquiry', *New Verse* (August 1934), p. 1.
- 34 'Poetry To-Day', p. 1.
- 35 Two questions were asked apart from those listed in the text: 'Do you think there can now be a use for narrative poetry?'; 'Have you been influenced by Freud and how do you regard him?' See Geoffrey Grigson, 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), 2-3 (p. 2).
- 36 Laura Riding, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), 3-5 (p. 5).
- 37 The replies of these poets were published in *New Verse* (October 1934), pp. 3-22. Others who replied were: Herbert Read, Wallace Stevens, A.J.M. Smith, e.e. cummings, David Gascoyne, Conrad Aiken, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Gavin Ewart, Allen Tate and George Barker. The replies of Archibald Macleish and Robinson Jeffers were included in the following issue, published in December 1934, pp. 17-18.

- 38 Grigson, 'An Enquiry', p. 2.
- 39 Louis Macneice, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), p. 7.
- 40 Wyndham Lewis, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), 7–8 (p. 8). Robert Graves, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), 5–6 (p. 6).
- 41 Hugh MacDiarmid, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), 18–19 (p. 19). Edwin Muir, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), p. 17.
- 42 Norman Cameron, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), p. 15.
- 43 Dylan Thomas, reply to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse* (October 1934), 8–9 (p. 9).
- 44 George Orwell, review of Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, *New English Weekly*, 14 November 1935, 96–7 (p. 96). *CEJL I*, 154–6 (p. 156).
- 45 Orwell, review of *Tropic of Cancer*, p. 96. *CEJL I*, p. 155.
- 46 George Orwell, review of Henry Miller, *Black Spring*, *New English Weekly*, 24 September 1936, 396–7 (p. 396). *CEJL I*, 230–2 (p. 230).
- 47 George Orwell, 'Bookshop Memories', *The Fortnightly Review* (November 1936), pp. 600–4. *CEJL I*, pp. 242–6.
- 48 For a history of *The Fortnightly Review* in the nineteenth century, see Dickie A. Spurgeon, 'The Fortnightly Review', in *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age 1837–1913*, edited by Alvin Sullivan (Westport, Connecticut, 1984), pp. 131–5.
- 49 Orwell, 'Bookshop Memories', p. 600. *CEJL I*, p. 242.
- 50 Orwell, 'Bookshop Memories', p. 602. *CEJL I*, p. 244.
- 51 Orwell, 'Bookshop Memories', p. 603. *CEJL I*, p. 245.
- 52 George Orwell, 'In Defence of the Novel', *New English Weekly*, Part I, 12 November 1936, pp. 91–2; Part II, 19 November 1936, pp. 111–12. *CEJL I*, pp. 249–55.
- 53 Orwell, 'In Defence of the Novel', p. 91. *CEJL I*, p. 250.
- 54 Orwell, 'In Defence of the Novel', p. 92. *CEJL I*, p. 252.
- 55 Orwell, 'In Defence of the Novel', p. 92. *CEJL I*, p. 253.
- 56 Orwell, 'In Defence of the Novel', p. 111. *CEJL I*, p. 253.
- 57 Orwell, 'In Defence of the Novel', p. 111. *CEJL I*, p. 253.
- 58 George Orwell, review of Philip Henderson, *The Novel Today*, *New English Weekly*, 31 December 1936, 229–30 (p. 229). *CEJL I*, 256–9 (p. 256).
- 59 Orwell, review of *The Novel Today*, p. 229. *CEJL I*, p. 256.
- 60 Orwell, review of *The Novel Today*, p. 229. *CEJL I*, p. 257.
- 61 Orwell, review of *The Novel Today*, p. 229. *CEJL I*, pp. 256–7. The recycled cartoon appears (slightly modified, but essentially the same) in Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 157. *CEJL I*, pp. 508–9.
- 62 *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1937).
- 63 Orwell, review of *The Novel Today*, p. 229. *CEJL I*, p. 251.
- 64 The pamphlet went unnumbered. This statement can be found on what would be page 3.
- 65 Valentine Cunningham, 'Neutral?: 1930s Writers and Taking Sides', in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, edited by Frank Gloversmith (Sussex, 1980), pp. 45–69.
- 66 Cunningham, p. 48.

- 67 Cunningham, p. 48.
- 68 George Orwell, letter to Stephen Spender, 2 April 1938. *CEJL I*, 311–12 (p. 312).
- 69 Stephen Spender, 'I Join The Communist Party', *Daily Worker*, 19 February 1937, p. 4.
- 70 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 336.
- 71 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 336.
- 72 Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (London, 1951), p. 210.
- 73 Spender, *World*, p. 211.
- 74 Announcement of Stephen Spender's membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.), in *Daily Worker*, 19 February 1937, p. 1.
- 75 Greetings to Stephen Spender on joining the C.P.G.B., in *Daily Worker*, 19 February 1937, p. 4.
- 76 Spender, 'I Join', p. 4.
- 77 Spender, 'I Join', p. 4.
- 78 Spender, *World*, p. 211.
- 79 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 80 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 81 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 82 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 83 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 84 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 337.
- 85 Orwell, 'Why I Join the I.L.P.', p. 4. *CEJL I*, p. 338.
- 86 George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', in *Inside the Whale & Other Essays* (London, 1940), 9–85 (p. 9). *CEJL I*, 413–60 (p. 413).
- 87 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 9. *CEJL I*, p. 414.
- 88 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 10. *CEJL I*, p. 414.
- 89 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 13. *CEJL I*, p. 416.
- 90 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 14. *CEJL I*, p. 417.
- 91 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 31. *CEJL I*, p. 427.
- 92 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', pp. 31–2. *CEJL I*, pp. 427–8.
- 93 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', pp. 32–3. *CEJL I*, p. 428.
- 94 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 36. *CEJL I*, p. 430.
- 95 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 38. *CEJL I*, p. 431.
- 96 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 40. *CEJL I*, p. 433.
- 97 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 42. *CEJL I*, p. 434.
- 98 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 42. *CEJL I*, p. 434.
- 99 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 43. *CEJL I*, p. 434.
- 100 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 60. *CEJL I*, p. 445.
- 101 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 66. *CEJL I*, p. 448.
- 102 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 79. *CEJL I*, pp. 456–7.
- 103 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', pp. 80–1. *CEJL I*, pp. 457.
- 104 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 81. *CEJL I*, p. 457.
- 105 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 81. *CEJL I*, p. 458.
- 106 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', pp. 83–4. *CEJL I*, p. 459.
- 107 Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 85. *CEJL I*, p. 460.
- 108 George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', in *Inside the Whale & Other Essays* (London, 1940), pp. 87–128. *CEJL I*, pp. 460–84.
- 109 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 91. *CEJL I*, p. 462.
- 110 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 128. *CEJL I*, p. 484.
- 111 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 90. *CEJL I*, p. 461.

- 112 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 91. *CEJL I*, p. 462.
- 113 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 95. *CEJL I*, p. 464.
- 114 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 99. *CEJL I*, p. 467.
- 115 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 99. *CEJL I*, p. 467.
- 116 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 106. *CEJL I*, p. 471.
- 117 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 108. *CEJL I*, p. 472.
- 118 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', pp. 108-9. *CEJL I*, pp. 472-3.
- 119 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', pp. 112-3. *CEJL I*, p. 475.
- 120 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 113. *CEJL I*, p. 475.
- 121 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 114. *CEJL I*, p. 476.
- 122 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 114. *CEJL I*, p. 476.
- 123 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 114. *CEJL I*, p. 476.
- 124 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 117. *CEJL I*, p. 478.
- 125 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 119. *CEJL I*, p. 479.
- 126 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 124. *CEJL I*, p. 482.
- 127 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', pp. 124-5. *CEJL I*, p. 482.
- 128 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 125. *CEJL I*, p. 483.
- 129 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 127. *CEJL I*, p. 484.
- 130 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', pp. 127-8. *CEJL I*, p. 484.
- 131 Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', p. 128. *CEJL I*, p. 484.
- 132 On flyleaf of *New Directions*.
- 133 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 185. *CEJL I*, p. 526.
- 134 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 187. *CEJL I*, p. 527.
- 135 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 188. *CEJL I*, p. 527.
- 136 Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon* (January 1940), p. 5.
- 137 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 174. *CEJL I*, p. 519.
- 138 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 177. *CEJL I*, p. 521.
- 139 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 131. *CEJL I*, p. 493.
- 140 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 131. *CEJL I*, p. 493.
- 141 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 134. *CEJL I*, p. 495.
- 142 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 153. *CEJL I*, p. 506.
- 143 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 156. *CEJL I*, p. 508.
- 144 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 160. *CEJL I*, p. 510.
- 145 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 166. *CEJL I*, p. 514.
- 146 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 168. *CEJL I*, p. 515.
- 147 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 171. *CEJL I*, p. 517.
- 148 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 172. *CEJL I*, p. 518.
- 149 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 173. *CEJL I*, p. 518.
- 150 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 174. *CEJL I*, p. 519.
- 151 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 176. *CEJL I*, p. 520.
- 152 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 177. *CEJL I*, p. 521.
- 153 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 185. *CEJL I*, p. 525.
- 154 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 186. *CEJL I*, p. 526.
- 155 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 186. *CEJL I*, p. 526.
- 156 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 186. *CEJL I*, p. 526.
- 157 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 187. *CEJL I*, p. 527.
- 158 Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', pp. 143-4. *CEJL I*, p. 500.
- 159 George Orwell, letter to Victor Gollancz, 8 January 1940. *CEJL I*, pp. 409-10 (p. 409).
- 160 Orwell, letter to Gollancz, pp. 409-10.
- 161 Q.D. Leavis, review of *Inside The Whale*, *Scrutiny* (September 1940), pp. 173-6. For a selection of initial reviews of the book, see

- Jeffrey Meyers, *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1975), pp. 175–90.
- 162 George Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', *The Listener*, 29 May 1941, pp. 768–9. *CEJL II*, pp. 123–7.
- 163 Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', p. 768. *CEJL II*, p. 124.
- 164 Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', p. 768. *CEJL II*, p. 126.
- 165 Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', pp. 768–9. *CEJL II*, p. 126.
- 166 Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', p. 768. *CEJL II*, p. 126.
- 167 Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', p. 769. *CEJL II*, p. 127.
- 168 George Orwell, 'Tolstoy and Shakespeare', *The Listener*, 5 June 1941, pp. 809–10. *CEJL II*, pp. 127–30.
- 169 Orwell, 'Tolstoy and Shakespeare', p. 809. *CEJL II*, p. 127.
- 170 Orwell, 'Tolstoy and Shakespeare', p. 810. *CEJL II*, p. 130.
- 171 George Orwell, 'The Meaning of a Poem', *The Listener*, 12 June 1941, p. 841. *CEJL I*, pp. 131–4.
- 172 Orwell, 'The Meaning of a Poem', p. 841. *CEJL II*, p. 132.
- 173 Orwell, 'The Meaning of a Poem', p. 841. *CEJL II*, p. 132.
- 174 Orwell, 'The Meaning of a Poem', p. 841. *CEJL II*, pp. 133–4.
- 175 The young writers themselves were not named.
- 176 Apart from those listed in the text, the writers who published the Manifesto were Arthur Calder-Marshall, Bonamy Dobree and Tom Harrison.
- 177 'Why Not War Writers', p. 236.
- 178 'Why Not War Writers', p. 238.
- 179 Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon* (February, 1943), 74–5 (p. 74).
- 180 'Combatant', letter to the Editor, *Horizon* (December 1941), 437–8 (p. 437).
- 181 'Combatant', p. 438.
- 182 'Combatant', p. 438.

Conclusion

The mentality of the English left-wing intelligentsia can be studied in half a dozen weekly and monthly papers. The immediately striking thing about all these papers is their generally negative, querulous attitude, their complete lack at all times of any constructive suggestion.

George Orwell, 'The Lion and The Unicorn', 1941.¹

The blend of insight and hyperbole at work in the quotation above should, by now, come as no surprise. Though recognising the importance of relatively marginal newspapers and periodicals in the publication of left-wing thought, Orwell goes too far in condemning those organs for a complete lack of constructive ideas. Indeed, for much of the period covered in this thesis, constructive suggestions drew the bitterest of Orwell's bile. The problem was that the championing of the Soviet Union, or the requirement that writers commit themselves politically, while meat for many of his foes and colleagues, were poisonous ideas for Orwell. Most of the time, at least; a change in his diet was not unknown.

Ironically, in many of the essays analysed in these pages, Orwell himself adopts a destructive strategy, assailing what he sees as pretension, propaganda, and plain untruth. As has been shown repeatedly, the essay form provides the perfect weapon for such rhetorical scuffles, allowing the contentious, unsubstantiated statement Orwell employs so adroitly. Significantly, too, the sorts of weekly and monthly papers and journals he attacks above are the same sort (and sometimes the self-same) he uses as vehicles for his own arguments. As a struggling writer, in the years at least until 1941, Orwell found periodicals and marginal newspapers fertile ground for planting his often unorthodox views. A failure to take the periodical into account risks misrepresenting the views set out within Orwell's essays.

Though the boundaries of this thesis stretch only as far as 1941, Orwell continued to place his essays in a diverse range of periodicals, both in Britain and the United States. A catalogue of such journals would include *Partisan Review*, *Horizon*, *Tribune*, *Persuasion*, *Polemic*, *Contemporary Jewish Record*, *Now*, *Gangrel* and *New Republic*. This (by

no means comprehensive) list shows both the wide reach of Orwell's essays, and the fundamental importance of the periodical as a means of publishing his views. It also points to a fact too-often forgotten: after *Coming Up For Air* in 1939, Orwell produced only two more works of fiction – *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The overwhelming bulk of his prolific output in the last eleven years of his life consisted of essays. For reasons of space, this thesis has only mapped part of the territory; the complete exploration of Orwell's essays requires further effort.

One problem awaiting the examination of the essays published after 1941 is that, while those such as 'Politics and the English Language' and 'Why I Write' continue to win plaudits, they, like the essays considered here, often are torn from their periodical context. In the act of tearing, much is lost, not least the sense of Orwell operating within a small, literate and volatile arena of public debate. Orwell's posthumous fame has tended to exaggerate the contemporary impact, the uniqueness, and the perceptiveness of his views. Orwell was as often right as wrong in his predictions, no matter his present day status as seer. Nor did he hold rock-steady to a particular view, while those about him ebbed and flowed with the political and literary tides. His essays provide evidence of a man of forthright views, but views which change over time, sometimes to the point where he contradicts positions he had once held vehemently.

The essay and the periodical allowed for the public modification of Orwell's ideas. Modification need not signal craven revisionism, for change can betoken an increasing sophistication of thought in the light of experience. The time period covered here had more than its share of 'experience'. Consequently, the ability in 1941 to hold true to a philosophy deemed satisfactory in 1931 might be more cause for alarm than satisfaction. What is true for Orwell naturally applies to his contemporaries. The necessary concentration on Orwell in this thesis should not disguise the fact that writers and thinkers such as Middleton Murry, Fenner Brockway, Stephen Spender, John Strachey, John Cornford and Victor Gollancz grabbed the opportunity afforded by periodicals to express their views in vigorous debates over questions of literature and politics.

Beyond these personalities, the periodicals themselves should not be ignored. Such journals as *Left Review* and *New Writing*, *The Adelphi* and *Cambridge Left*, *Controversy* and *New Leader* provided not only the vehicle for the expression of views, but also focal points for people of like mind. They also provided ready targets for their competitors or opponents, points of conflict which themselves generated new (if not always better)

ideas. Though they might not fully equate with Habermas's concept of a classical bourgeois sphere, the quality of periodical contributors, the importance of the topics for discussion, and the small but loyal readerships, suggest an active, and vital arena for the transmission of ideas.

Despite their importance, however, the significance of periodicals goes largely unacknowledged in studies of English literature in the thirties and early forties. Exceptions to the rule would be Symuel Hynes's *The Auden Generations*,² Valentine Cunningham's voluminous *British Writers of the Thirties*,³ and Julian Symons's *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved*.⁴ Yet, as the titles of the first two studies suggest, though the impact of periodicals is recognised, they provide only background to a focus on the writers themselves. Symons values the periodical more explicitly (he cordons off a chapter), but the limits of space placed on his wide-ranging survey of the decade restrict him to examining two representative journals. Admittedly, *New Verse* and *Left Review* were important in themselves, but they provide only an introduction to the complete story.

It takes little beyond two eyes to notice the enfeebled state of the periodical today. Whether or not the obituary can yet be printed for a form which has enlivened debate for nearly three hundred years, remains to be seen. Miracle cures, however, are not in evidence. Yet the poor condition of the periodical at present should not hinder researchers from recording its importance, at least as recently as fifty years ago. Reasons for its demise in the years since need also to be fashioned. As this thesis has shown, periodicals provided many of the best writers of their time with a vehicle for expression. Undoubtedly, they also provided readers with ideas, both to discuss and to discard. All this is taken as given in the many analyses of periodicals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Implicit in the overall argument of this thesis is the view that the periodical in the twentieth century deserves due recognition. This need not require the multi-national forces (this author being but one) employed in the production of Orwell studies. It might, however, be within reason to hope for a small, but worthwhile, cottage industry.

Footnotes

- 1 George Orwell, 'The Lion and The Unicorn' (London, 1941), p.47. *CEJL II*, p.74.

- 2 Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, 1976)
- 3 Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford, 1988)
- 4 Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London, 1975)

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